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AN ARGUMENT FOR THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION;

DRAWN FROM A

COMPARISON OF REVELATION

WITH THE

NATURAL OPERATIONS of the MIND:

Being the SUBSTANCE of

TWENTY-FOUR SERMONS

PREACHED AT

The LECTURE founded by the Hon. ROBERT BOYLE, Esq; in the Parish-Church of St. MARY-LE-BOW, in the Years 1778, 1779, 1780,

IN FOUR BOOKS.

BY JAMES WILLIAMSON, B.D.

Blessed are *the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

LONDON:
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M.DCC.LXXXIII.

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

LORD GEORGE CAVENDISH,

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

LORD FREDERICK CAVENDISH,

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

LORD JOHN CAVENDISH,

TRUSTEES for the Lecture founded by the Honourable ROBERT BOYLE, Esq;

THIS DISCOURSE

IS MOST HUMBLY DEDICATED,

BY

THEIR LORDSHIPS

MOST OBLIGED,

AND MOST OBEDIENT,

HUMBLE SERVANT,

JAMES WILLIAMSON.

AN

ARGUMENT

FOR THE

CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

BOOK I.

Containing an Inquiry into the Riſe and Progreſs of thoſe Religious Opinions which ſeem natural to all Mankind.

CHAP. I.

Of PREJUDICE.

THE moſt remarkable circumſtance in the human character ſeems to be that great uniformity of powers and inclinations which is found among men; by which they are enabled to act in concert, to extend their ſocial union from one extremity of the world to another, and to join in any general effort to improve their nature and faculties. Without this *ſameneſs* of conſtitution there could have been no knowledge, for it is this that enables one man to judge of the wants and views of another, and of the probability of his ſucceeding in any undertaking, almoſt with

the ſame certainty as if the particular caſe had been his own; and thus alſo, our feelings being ſimilar, we can ſubſtitute ourſelves in the place of another; and, by making his ſchemes our own, partake of all his hopes and fears. And what is more, even our artificial habits, as a conſequence indeed of this, are nearly the ſame; or if this is not naturally the caſe, from the great pliableneſs of the human mind, we have very little doubts of being able to make it ſo: and our education muſt be undertaken upon ſuch a belief; for the very attempt to educate ſuppoſes that a man can form the ſame habits in another which have been formed in himſelf. And thus the firmeſt foundation ſeems to be laid for the greateſt harmony of efforts and opinions among men. By exhibiting only one ſide of human nature, a rational creature, who knew nothing of man but what he could learn from that view, ought to be convinced that there never could be ſuch a thing as a diſpute in the world; nothing but wiſdom and ignorance liſtening and inſtructing each other.

Yet notwithſtanding this general uniformity of character and abilities diſcoverable in the human ſpecies; it is no leſs true that, in many reſpects, the faculties and inclinations of men are extremely different, indicating, whenever occaſions offer, ſtrong inclinations to different purſuits, from the earlieſt infancy. And although mankind are all formed with the ſame faculties, and ſhould happen to have the ſame ſeeds of inſtruction ſown in their minds, yet they will neglect ſome and cultivate others without any reaſon of preference, apparent to themſelves or others; and this will produce many different opinions and views of things, which, we ſay, very properly, ſpring from prejudice.

Nor is this any blemiſh in our conſtitution, when it is conſidered, that we are in a ſtate, where much of our improvement is left to ourſelves. And the attentive obſerver will accordingly find, that much of the buſineſs, and much of the improvement of the world, has no other ſpring to put it in motion, but prejudices of one kind or another. A genius, bent or inclination for particular employments, arts or purſuits; the prejudice of rank, profeſſion and education, to ſay nothing of national prejudice, are ſuch powerful inſtruments in human affairs, that the actions of mankind would be deprived of the great principle which governs them and keeps them in vigour, if theſe prejudices made no part of our conſtitution. In ſhort, we are formed with ſuch a variety of talents and diſpoſitions, ſeemingly on purpoſe to teach us, that by the very nature and adjuſtment of the ſeveral parts of our conſtitution, we are predetermined, and as it were, formed for certain purpoſes; and that it never was the intention of our Creator, in our preſent imperfect ſtate, to have all mankind of the ſame opinion; but that the rich and the poor; the fooliſh and the wiſe; the active and the indolent, ſhould misjudge, deſpiſe and envy each other's ſituation, attainments, and circumſtances. For, with the ordinary infirmities of human nature, and deprived of the advantages ariſing from prejudices of different kinds, man, in all probability, would have been a ſtupid, ſplenetic, ſenſual and unteachable animal; as the improvement both of the individual and of the ſpecies, according to the preſent ſtate of the world, ſeems chiefly to be carried on by jarring principles and falſe or inadequate proſpects of things: And human frailty makes this almoſt the ſureſt way to

truth, ſo little are we influenced by the naked reality of things.

It is upon this ground that it might be ſaid, that much miſchief may be done, by endeavouring haſtily and injudiciouſly to remove real prejudices. For, it is extremely probable that, inſtead of ſubſtituting truth in the place of them, we are only exchanging one prejudice for another: and the conſequence may be much worſe, if nothing be ſubſtituted in their room, becauſe thus all our principles of action may be deſtroyed; and many, whoſe worldly circumſtances place them at their eaſe, have their principles of action, in reality, thus deſtroyed. For when you have once convinced a man, in a few inſtances, that what he took to be a ſerious and well-founded truth is only prejudice, there will be very little difficulty in perſuading him to rank a troubleſome truth among prejudices. Tell a rich man that Religion is nothing but prieſtcraft; that patriotiſm is a farce; and that he himſelf is a fool, if he do not enjoy his wealth, in every way which his appetites prompt him, and, if your opinion has any weight or credit with him, he will ſoon loſe ſight of every duty, and forget that he himſelf is ſupported by ſociety, ſinking gradually into a ſenſual creature, until he becomes (as the ſcripture very emphatically expreſſes the ſtate of the Antediluvians) *nothing but fleſh.*

And yet ſurely prejudices ought to be removed, though not in the ſuperficial manner practiſed by modern reformers. The reaſoning of ages, corrected and ſupported by a frequently varied experience, is neceſſary for giving a firm eſtabliſhment to ſome truths, eſpecially ſuch as have had a general prejudice againſt them: As, on the other hand,

hand, thoſe truths, which are a check upon the paſſions of men, will be readily turned over to the claſs of prejudices, upon the ſtrength of a joke, or of the moſt fanciful and ill-founded reaſonings: and therefore every wiſe, or even prudent, man will reject thoſe abſurd or at beſt inadequate methods of levelling prejudices, however faſhionable, which are borrowed from theoretical ſpeculations, ornamented, but not ſupported, by facts; and propoſed to the world in this form chiefly, becauſe they are ſuppoſed to fall in with the humour of the times, which, at preſent, is by no means that of ſearching whether the things propoſed to our conſideration have a firm foundation in experience, or depend upon well-atteſted facts.

Truths ought to be examined by the nature and circumſtances of men and things, and not according to the limited, fanciful and partial notions of true and falſe, in the eſtabliſhing of which mankind ſeem to have diſcovered a more than ordinary degree of folly, at the very time when they are producing themſelves as models of wiſdom, and ſtandards for regulating the judgement of the whole world. Mankind have a certain ſphere allotted them, within which they may act with propriety and judge with certainty, but when they attempt excurſions beyond this, they bring nothing back but proofs of their vanity and folly.

Nor is this without its uſe, when it is conſidered, that it is only by compariſon that we can regulate or change our opinions: and therefore right and wrong, truth and falſhood, wiſdom and folly muſt be plentifully ſown over the world, merely as the neceſſary means of improvement to rational and limited creatures, in all thoſe circumſtances, where

their conduct and opinions are to depend upon themſelves, acting as free agents, and without ſupernatural inſtruction. And if our errors were merely of a ſpeculative nature, implying only greater or leſs degrees of wiſdom or folly, time and chance, or the ſeveral accidents of the world, would go a great way towards correcting them.

But our weak ſide is where our morals are concerned; and it is here that, in a particular manner, we are apt to delude ourſelves, and are expoſed to the attacks of deluſion. It is true God has particularly guarded us from ſuch errors, by ſtrong natural ſentiments, in favour of virtue; but, in an improved ſtate of ſociety, our duties multiply upon us, and become more difficult to perform, from the increaſe of temptations; and finding them burthenſome, we are eaſily diſpoſed to liſten to any reaſons for neglecting them. Yet, if the fact were not certain, it would ſeem very extraordinary that Reaſon and Religion ſhould have often been employed to furniſh arguments for ſuch a neglect, and to eradicate the natural ſentiments, implanted in the mind by God himſelf.

It is undoubtedly true, that our morals may be corrupted or improved, by human reaſon and Religion: they are both dangerous inſtruments, when in improper hands, becauſe in their natural and original ſtate, as formed by men to ſupply their moſt preſſing neceſſities, they are little better than the blundering operations of ignorance, paſſion and prejudice; and conſequently are more dangerous than theſe, being a compoſition made out of them veſted with a kind of authority; and may do good or harm according as they are employed to counteract or ſupport the failings and imperfections of mankind.

Not

Not that I conſider both as equally in the power of men to regulate. The circumſtances of the world continually improve or corrupt the reaſon of men, ſo that it can hardly ever be ſtationary, except where human nature is degraded almoſt below the rational level, while their religious opinions never vary from their original abſurdity. And had there never been a real revelation, I queſtion whether there ever had been ſuch a thing as a religious diſpute in the world, in the ſenſe in which that word is underſtood among Chriſtians. Men would have changed their religious opinions, with as little difficulty, and even with as little conſequence, as they do the faſhion of their cloaths. And thus it happens that by their rational exertions alone, we can trace the progreſs, refinement and corruptions of nations; but even where mankind have exhibited the greateſt variety of extraordinary abilities, we find their Religion during all theſe changes the ſame inanimate maſs of corruption as we found it at the beginning.

I ſaid the circumſtances of the world improve, but I think they are even ſufficient for perfecting human reaſon, though a deliberate and extenſive obſervation is neceſſary for this purpoſe, inſtead of the haſty way of voting every thing a prejudice, which does not agree with the mode of thinking which may be in faſhion at the time. Many truths are relative, and ſuited to particular circumſtances; and if the circumſtances be changed, theſe truths muſt vary with them. They may be relative to our ſenſations: Thus the ſame water may convey, the different and even oppoſite ſenſations of heat and cold, to the ſame perſon at the ſame time: and bodies at reſt may appear to be

in motion or the contrary. Truths of this kind partake of the nature of prejudice, and are only to be aſſented to, when referred to a particular ſtandard. A ſtandard derived from the nature of heat, or the nature of motion, would be more accurate than our ſenſes: and yet no man, with impunity, can neglect his ſenſations; and he would loſe too much by having his body converted into a thermometer.

There are truths alſo which have the human faculties for their ſtandard, which muſt be very variable, as they will depend upon that view of the ſubject, which different people may take, which will be as various as their faculties and improvements; and yet all ſuch are truths in a certain ſenſe, and are by no means to be neglected; it is only neceſſary to know the true nature of ſuch truths, ſo as to be able to refer them to their proper claſs. We have likewiſe artificial truths which mankind have made ſuch arbitrarily, and in many of them ſeem to have conſulted nothing but their own humour. Thoſe who would confine truth to mathematical demonſtration, do not conſider that human nature cannot afford that all the world ſhould be mathematicians, with their views confined ſolely to the properties of extenſion and number.

Yet, amidſt ſuch a chaos of opinions and prejudices, it is poſſible to arrive at a conſiſtency in thinking; for the natural progreſs of ſociety cures ſuch prejudices, or rather ſhews them in their proper light, and more perfect notions of things are the conſequence of every improvement, which is generally grounded upon a more accurate and extenſive experience, founded however upon the firſt imperfect notions, ſo that a progreſs through them

them ſeems to be neceſſary: for I am certain that a man who never had any prejudices, never had, nor can have any real knowledge. And thus by attention mankind may, in proper circumſtances, gradually ſhake off their prejudices, and gain ground upon every ſubject which reaſon can improve; either making their notions more accurate or their views more extenſive, arriving at what might be called the perfection of reaſon. In ſhort this ſeems to be a talent, with the improvement of which mankind may be ſafely entruſted, nor ought they in this caſe to look for ſupernatural aſſiſtance.

It is very different however with Religion; for the prejudices ariſing from ſuperſtition ſeem beyond the power of man to correct, and the taſk ſeems to have been put into his hands for no other purpoſe but to convince him of his inability. Of all our natural propenſities the call to be religious, both from our faculties and circumſtances, appears to be the ſtrongeſt; and thus it comes to paſs, that the haſty notions which we are obliged to take up with at firſt, are but little in our power to regulate afterwards, being chiefly ſuggeſted by the imagination, prompted by fear, which creates prejudices of a very different kind from thoſe, which have their firſt beginnings in the imperfection of our ſenſes. The improvements of ſociety may give our religious notions a faſhion, or be the occaſion of adding or taking away ſomething; which it is eaſy to do without ſkill or without producing any improvement, when you have a confuſed maſs to work upon: It may change its ſize or ſhape without gaining or loſing any thing in proportion, utility or beauty, there being no ſtandard to which it can be referred.

The

The prejudices of ſenſe are founded in facts, and may be corrected by facts, but the prejudices of ſuperſtition are founded in the imagination, and can only be changed for new fancies equally extravagant and groundleſs as the former, and this never could produce any improvement. And thus it happened that the heathen ſuperſtitions were become a monſter which was to be cruſhed and annihilated by an irreſiſtible power, as being irreducible to any conſiſtent or rational ſhape; and the memory of it only preſerved as a proof of human weakneſs and extravagance.

And to ſupply its place the Chriſtian Religion preſents itſelf to us, though in a very different manner. It produces itſelf as a fixed truth, an unalterable and determinate matter of fact, to which nothing can be added, and from which nothing can be taken away by men; demanding credit, and, at the ſame time, profeſſing itſelf to be above human comprehenſion; diſdaining to be tried by any teſt of human invention, but, forcing a new kind of evidence upon us, the evidence of faith; which hurts our philoſophic pride, and creates it great oppoſition from the wiſe men of this world, who think that every ſubject is to be new modelled to advantage by their faculties. And this Religion, refuſing to accommodate itſelf to circumſtances, by favouring the vices and views of mankind, breeds no leſs enmity againſt itſelf among the worldly-minded, whoſe paſſions and wiſhes are generally at variance with its doctrines.

This is a yoke that mankind never could have laid upon their own necks, and therefore muſt owe its beginning, progreſs, and ſupport to ſome foreign cauſe: and what that cauſe may be is an inquiry of more importance to us than any thing whatever.

Superſtition

Superſtition and a true Religion are equally unmanageable by reaſon. Nevertheleſs human reaſon is very capable of examining their different characters, even ſo accurately that a man may chuſe with certainty between them. And as we have no direct ſtandard of revelation in our minds to appeal to, a compariſon of the Chriſtian Religion with the ſuperſtitions natural to men, and the operations of the human underſtanding, ſeems to be the moſt general and rational ground of conviction upon this ſubject, at leaſt it is almoſt the only effectual method for removing all religious prejudices, which equally enſlave the Chriſtian and the philoſopher. And for this purpoſe, I propoſe to lay before you, what I take to be the natural operations of the human mind, under the dominion of paſſion and the guidance of reaſon, upon the ſubject of Religion: and, by ſhewing what a different ſyſtem would be produced, prove that the Chriſtian Religion comes from God.

But here there are a claſs of prejudices which ſtand in our way, very different from thoſe already mentioned, as they are not marks of weakneſs of underſtanding, but of the ſtrength of paſſion. A prejudice againſt a perſon, a prejudice againſt a ſubject, and others of the like kind. *Is not this the carpenter's ſon? Theſe are hard ſayings, who can hear them?* Such prejudices when they are without malice, and taken up merely as a pretence to indulge an indolent diſpoſition or to remove a diſagreeable truth out of ſight, are far from being innocent. A man's ears ſhould always be open to conviction, and our attention ſhould be more eſpecially rouſed to diſagreeable truths. Even he who thinks he has reaſon to

wiſh

wiſh that the contents of the Bible may not be true, ought not to let his wiſhes, ſo far get the better of his underſtanding, as to neglect attending to the evidence offered to his conſideration, and implicitly believe thoſe, who tell him that there is no difference between Chriſtianity and the ſuperſtitions of the heathens. A man who ſuffers himſelf to be deluded into ſuch an opinion, upon the partial repreſentation of a few detached facts, is exactly in the ſituation of one who could be led to deſpiſe the moſt excellent compoſition of human genius, by having it repreſented to him, that all the words in it were to be found in the dictionary; only with this difference, that the one would be the ſubject of human ridicule, but the other of divine vengeance.

CHAP. II.

Of the Nature and extent of Superſtition, as derived from the Faculties and Circumſtances of Men.

SUPPOSE mankind left to diſperſe themſelves in this world, with ſuch faculties as we find them poſſeſſed of at preſent, and under the dominion of their ordinary paſſions; making their way through dangers and temptations, without any other aid or impediment than what they may receive from one another; and in this ſituation, we know that they would ſoon be ſenſible of many wants, and liable to many apprehenſions, and much the greateſt number of thoſe impoſſible to be relieved or removed by any of the objects which preſented themſelves. Nay, whoever ſhould happen

pen to be ſo much maſter of circumſtances, as to be able to chuſe any particular ſituation, even the moſt favourable to health and happineſs which this world affords; and together with this could place himſelf in the moſt diſtinguiſhed rank in life; if he promiſed himſelf compleat happineſs even from theſe ſingular privileges, he would find by experience that he was but little acquainted with himſelf. Becauſe it appears from the paſſions implanted in human nature, that man, inſtead of being formed to have his views fixed upon any determinate ſet of objects, is intended for various ſtages and ſtates of exiſtence; and not like the beaſts to have his wiſhes confined to the preſent moment. And although every climate, every age, every rank in life furniſh certain enjoyments and gratifications; yet no climate, no period of time, no rank or ſtation in life can fully gratify all his affections and deſires, and ſecure him againſt the accidents of futurity; his ſatisfactions alſo ariſing more from his future proſpects than from any preſent enjoyments. And therefore a man will depend upon the future, more than upon any thing which he poſſeſſes for the preſent; and the things of futurity being contingent, and even the preſent uncertain, eſpecially in the early periods of ſociety; hopes and fears will engage moſt of his attention; for it is only by theſe that uncertain things and the things of futurity are to be eſtimated.

In the early period, of which I am now ſpeaking, mankind would have no experience to direct them; they could learn no leſſon from the hiſtory of the ſucceſs or failures of others; and from a conſciouſneſs of their own weakneſſes, with the help of a few diſappointments, no ſcheme that they could deviſe

deviſe would appear after a little experience, by any means certain to bring about the ends they might have in view. I ſay after a little experience, becauſe, before mankind had any ſettled rules or plans to direct them, they would be continually blundering, even in their moſt ordinary buſineſs, which would very much weaken any natural confidence which they might have in themſelves, to a degree that when they happened to ſucceed, the accompliſhment of their ſchemes would be referred to ſomething beſides their own ingenuity. And very ſlight things indeed will have ſome influence in a ſtate of ſuſpence and uncertainty, for a throw of the dice, coinciding with a man's own wiſhes, will give him ſome ſpirits, and even determine him to act, ſo naturally have we recourſe to ſecret and unſeen influence; and that degree of prudence, which is to deprive Fortune of her rank as a divinity, could not be reached by the Romans in their higheſt ſtate of improvement, which is owned by Juvenal in theſe lines:

> Nullum numen habes, ſi ſit prudentia: ſed te
> Nos facimus, Fortuna, Deam, cœloque locamus.

We who have the laws of nature and the principles of Religion reduced to a kind of certainty, which in ſome ſenſe makes us independent, can hardly conceive the perplexity and anxiety of mankind in a ſtate of nature, or during the firſt beginnings of ſociety, eſpecially when agitated by thoſe hopes and fears, which are raiſed by the certainty of death, and the uncertainty of the time when it will happen. Now, upon trying occaſions, where a man's own powers and all the natural means which his reaſon can ſuggeſt have been exhauſted,

where

where is he to look for aſſiſtance? Certainly it ſeems natural that a man in real or imaginary diſtreſs, after he has done his beſt in a natural way, will ſet his own imagination or that of others to work, in order to form ſome *Being* with ſuch powers and attributes as his particular circumſtances require, and his immediate wants ſtand in need of. I have mentioned the imagination of others, becauſe there is ſome reaſon to think, that the imaginations of his neighbours would be chiefly employed in this god-making buſineſs; for a man in dread or danger rejects no advice that is offered him, and has a better opinion of every body's underſtanding than of his own. His neighbour might recommend it to him, to do any thing in jeſt or earneſt; and as things are often apprehended to be worſe than they turn out to be, the ſuperſtitious man aſcribes it to ſome inviſible interpoſition, that his misfortunes did not come up to the meaſure of his own fears.

But ſuch *Beings* cannot anſwer the ſuperſtitious man's purpoſes without a will and a kind of free agency, ſuperadded to a power of producing effects; and as ſuch a *Being* cannot be compelled, he muſt be entreated to lend his aſſiſtance, or perhaps bribed to do it, ſo much are men diſpoſed to make their Gods after their own image: Becauſe this cannot be ſuch a power as produces effects by the application of one material agent to another, in ſuch a manner that its aſſiſtance may be regularly expected whenever certain means have been uſed. For the diſcovery of ſuch powers is not the work of the imagination, but the effect of a regular and attentive experience.

Now, a ſupernatural Being endued with free agency will never ſubmit his actions to the teſt of experience;

experience; and this very circumſtance carries ſuch deluſions beyond the reach of experience to remedy. For after a thouſand failures and diſappointments, the ſuperſtitious man will ſtill continue to vary the mode of his application, with a conſtant and firm perſuaſion that there is a remedy ſomewhere, although he has not been ſo lucky as to find it.

His Deity, that he applied to, may want inclination or perhaps power from the buſineſs being out of his province: he will therefore have recourſe to ſome other Gods; and will furniſh himſelf with an excuſe for every diſappointment; and the large claſs of ſeemingly contingent events, will feed his hopes, alarm his fears, and keep up his deluſions.

And thus it comes to paſs that no rational creature can enjoy life, or even ſupport it, without religious opinions of one kind or another: if a Religion be not communicated to him, he will make one for himſelf which muſt ſerve him for a temporary relief, though it ſhould happen not to be of that determinate or durable kind which his circumſtances may require. For even the unbeliever himſelf will readily acknowledge that he was in ſome part of his life a ſuperſtitious creature; and that the triumph over ſuperſtition was only the laſt effort of his rational faculties.

To ſuppoſe a people without Religion ſeems to me the ſame thing as to ſuppoſe a people without hopes and fears; for it is impoſſible to gratify and keep up thoſe paſſions, but by ſuch objects as will lead men beyond their own natural abilities, even to ſuch a degree as to make them put their truſt in any thing ſooner than relinquiſh all hopes.

It is true, the religious principle taken in this ſenſe is very general, and may be gratified and ſupported by any thing whoſe powers we are not acquainted with. Any thing animate, or inanimate, real or imaginary to which credulity or knavery has aſcribed any ſupernatural or extraordinary powers, may be the object of ſuperſtition; and the leſs we are acquainted with the nature of things, the fitter will they be, for being turned to ſuperſtitious uſes. For this and other obvious reaſons the heavenly bodies are moſt likely to challenge the attention of a ſuperſtitious man; and as life would appear to him an advantage, he would likewiſe ſuppoſe the ſtars endued with life and ſpontaneous motion, which would be readily believed of *Beings* ſo far beyond the reach of vulgar knowledge.

Nor would mankind be content with gods ſimply to protect them; but they would require others to aſſiſt them in the gratifications of their paſſions, in ſhort as this kind of ſupernatural aſſiſtance could be ſo eaſily had, they would not be very ſcrupulous in having recourſe to it, upon almoſt every occaſion.

This repreſentation, it is true, deſcribes mankind as given over to deluſion, from the very nature of their faculties, paſſions and affections; and that to ſuch a degree, as would overpower their reaſon, corrupt their morals, and prevent all improvement, unleſs ſome circumſtances ſhould concur to moderate or correct this infatuation.

CHAP. III.

Of the natural Remedies of Superſtition.

BUT it is to be obſerved that all our hopes and fears cannot be immediately grounded on Religion. Mankind would find that ſome wiſhes were to be gratified even fully, by a proper uſe of their natural faculties, and by the application of one material agent to another; and that ſome evils were to be avoided by the ſame means, in a more regular and effectual manner than by any mode of ſuperſtition.

This diſcovery, it might be pretended, would be the occaſion of a diviſion of events into ſuch as were in our own power, and ſuch as exceeded it; and that the province of ſuperſtition would thus come to be marked out, though by very arbitrary limits; as mankind might rather be ſaid to have found out a rule for ſettling it, than to be poſſeſſed of ſufficient means or materials, to aſcertain the proper bounds: having recourſe to ſuperſtitious practices when they ought to uſe their own natural powers; or joining the ſuperſtitious practices to the exertions of their natural powers, they would allow the ſuperſtition a large ſhare of the merit of the ſucceſs. And though this would retard the progreſs of their improvement at firſt, yet taking it once for granted that they could do ſomething of themſelves, it might be ſaid, that the more they improved their faculties, the dominion of ſuperſtition would be proportionably leſſened, and why not in time compleatly aboliſhed.

But

But thoſe who reaſon in this manner ſeem to forget that ſuch reformers have no materials to work with, at leaſt none fit for ſuch an undertaking. Their building would become a caſtle in the air, which the leaſt blaſt of the boiſterous paſſions would demoliſh. The truth of this aſſertion will be beſt determined by tracing the progreſs of ſuperſtition, and by conſidering the additions and impediments which it is likely to receive from the circumſtances of men and things.

Thoſe who have proper notions of the power of a ſtock or a ſtone, even when dignified with the honour of being the repreſentative of an imaginary ſupernatural *Being*, will readily believe that ſuch as put their truſt in them would be frequently diſappointed. Yet, when they had once gone ſo far as to honour them as gods, inſtead of aſcribing the failure to the true cauſe, they would naturally conclude that the diſappointment originated from ſomething in themſelves; ſo much do mankind work in the dark, when they work with ſuperſtition. They would ſuppoſe that they had been deficient in reſpect to this ſupernatural *Being*, or were ignorant of the proper way of approaching him, ſo as to render him propitious. Cunning men, and perhaps cunning women, would take advantage of this diſpoſition of the people, and making pretences that they were in the ſecret, or perhaps fancying themſelves to be ſo, would turn the credulous humour of the multitude to their own advantage, by ſetting up the trade of conſulting oracles, and influencing ſupernatural powers.

Nor would it be long before ſuch inſtances of great weakneſs would be daily preſented to them, as could not fail to lead them to conceive a very

high opinion of the credulity of mankind, though a more contemptible one of their underſtanding than they had before. For inſtead of requiring art to deceive the multitude, they would find every hour furniſhing them with dupes, preſenting themſelves, and tempting them to deceive them from the eaſineſs of the undertaking, or rather who would go more than half way to deceive themſelves.

A man's natural ſuperſtition is a very heavy load, which he would be very glad to transfer ſomewhere elſe with the firſt opportunity: and thus any kind of public creed, would be ſuch a relief, of which he could not fail to take the firſt advantage. For though the pride of man, when he is entirely at his eaſe, is continually lifting him up to independence, yet when he is allowed to feel his real ſituation, he is glad to be directed, and is fond of living in a crowd profeſſing the ſame ſentiments with himſelf, either from a ſenſe of weakneſs, or an averſion to trouble.

Nothing therefore could be more agreeable to any one in ſuch circumſtances, than to have his ſuperſtition ſo well regulated, that he had only to repair to a certain place, and do as he was inſtructed, or as he ſaw others do; which would keep his mind at eaſe, and flatter his indolence.

Nor would the philoſophic ſpirit, prevailing in a Nation, be able to give any check to ſuperſtition. For philoſophy requires an adequate cauſe to produce an effect, and ſuch as will always produce the ſame effect, and neither one greater or leſs; whereas, according to the ſuperſtitious man, a few words may bring down the Moon: *Carmina vel cælo poſſunt deducere Lunam*; which is ſufficient to ſhew the abſurdity of attempting to overcome

by any fixed rules, a prejudice which diſdains all rule.

But I ſhould be glad to know how the philoſophers themſelves, were to eſcape the general infection: that they did not is an undoubted fact; for the moſt ancient philoſophers had their reaſonings about natural things ſtrongly tinctured with ſuperſtition, and were no leſs abſurd in the cauſes which they aſſigned, than the moſt ſuperſtitious of the vulgar. What ſhall we ſay of Cleanthes's opinion as handed down by Cicero, which ſhews his underſtanding to have been ſo perverted, that it is not eaſy to conceive by what ſteps it could have been rectified. "Ali autem "Solem, Lunam, reliqua aſtra, aquis alia dul-"cibus, alia marinis. Eamque cauſam Cleanthes "affert, cur ſe ſol referat, nec longius progre-"diatur ſolſtitiali orbe, itemque brumali, ne lon-"gius diſcedat a cibo." Thus we find according to this philoſopher (whoſe opinions, abſurd as they are, antiquity thought worth the preſerving) the ſun is a free agent, and like an animal goes to the different ſides of the equator in ſearch of food. Surely ſuch philoſophers were much more likely to increaſe than to diminiſh the ſtock of vulgar ſuperſtitions.

If it ſhould be ſaid that ſuch a philoſophy as Newton's might cure mankind of the greateſt part of their ſuperſtitions, as it would at leaſt give them true and proper notions of that *hoſt of heaven*, which was ſo general an object of their ſuperſtition. But it ſeems impoſſible to conceive that ſuch ſpeculations would have been tolerated or reliſhed, or even thought of, among a people addicted to the ſuperſtition of regarding the heavenly bodies as divinities.

And if a philoſopher had been poſſeſſed of ſuch a diſcovery, he never durſt have publiſhed it; for certain death would have been the conſequence of ſuch a daring and impious thought, as the reducing ſuch glorious bodies, to the ſame condition as the dirt and rubbiſh which we trample under our feet. Such powerful patrons are the people of the idols which they ſet up, whether gods or men. They feel their own weakneſs to ſuch a degree, as will not ſuffer them to allow the leaſt inquiry into the nature and qualities of their Idols.

However, let us ſuppoſe ſuch a diſcovery made and publiſhed to the world; I think it would in this caſe have no effect; becauſe one thing is certain, that the true knowledge even of thoſe general laws which take place in the ſolar ſyſtem, muſt always, as it is at preſent, be confined to a very few, not taking in at a moderate computation the thouſandth part of thoſe that are generally reputed learned; and therefore could never baniſh from the world the notions of planetary influence, and other ſuperſtitions depending upon the ſtars. And if it had not been for the Chriſtian Religion, inſtead of making uſe of Eclipſes for ſettling the longitude of places, we ſhould have ſtill been beating drums to relieve the Moon in labour.

This glimmering of light, which had to paſs through the dark medium of intricate computation, would ſoon have been extinguiſhed and overpowered by the clouds that would have been raiſed to intercept it.

The ſophiſtical reaſonings of ſuch as might happen to have a command of language, and a turn of argument ſuited to the humour of mankind, would have ſoon got the better of every thing that could have been alledged in favour of ſuch

ſuch a ſyſtem. Tradition, a flight of the imagination, and a certain fanciful art of repreſenting things by ſimilitudes, would make their way very readily to ſuch heads, as ſhew themſelves but ill diſpoſed to follow the ſteps of a mathematical demonſtration. This diſcovery made its way but ſlowly, and with difficulty, in an age when mankind ſeemed to be panting after that kind of knowledge: ſuch a diſcovery, therefore, in the dark ages of ſuperſtition would have vaniſhed, leaving human nature at liberty to reſume all its antient ſuperſtitions. And even from a view of what at preſent is called natural philoſophy, I ſee great reaſon to apprehend that Newton's diſcoveries will become traditionary tales; the preſerving and communicating the principles of them requiring a greater expence of thought than the preſent age can afford to beſtow.

It has alſo been ſaid that politicians invented Religion; and of courſe, when they pleaſed, might have deſtroyed their own inventions, and extirpated ſuperſtition, by letting the world into the ſecret of the impoſition that had been put upon them. It would be juſt as wiſe and reaſonable to ſay that they invented hunger and thirſt, or any other natural appetites, for all theſe are equally the gift of nature, and have been, upon occaſion, converted by politicians to anſwer their purpoſes. They have been *often* able to regulate the modes of gratifying the appetites of hunger and thirſt, and legiſlators have *ſometimes* modified ſuperſtition, in order to make it, as far as they could, conſiſtent with the good of ſociety; and the little morality, that is ſometimes diſcoverable in the heathen Religion, is probably their work: For a man of himſelf would never have recourſe to ſupernatural aſ-

ſiſtance for the regulation of his morals, this being a want that individuals never feel.

But the misfortune is, that legiſlators and philoſophers had no ſtandard for directing themſelves in their alterations, had they been never ſo well diſpoſed, but the good of ſociety, which they all conceived to be conſiſtent with a multitude of the worſt kinds of ſuperſtition. A legiſlator might be able, ſo far to lay the man aſide, while he was conſidering any ſcheme of policy, as to keep his own weakneſſes out of ſight; but he had neither knowledge nor authority to go any farther than to modify the ſuperſtitions.

If the people were diſpoſed to claim a general indulgence of certain paſſions, from the example of their gods, the magiſtrate might ſo far prevail, as to perſuade them that this indulgence was to be confined to a certain time and place, and perhaps carried on in the form of a religious ceremony.

Even if the ſupreme magiſtrate had the power of deſtroying certain ſuperſtitions for a time, as he had not the ability to put any thing more rational in their place; a ſuperſtition ſo checked would only undergo a temporary ceſſation, and after a little while human nature would be the ſame as before. Thus we find legiſlators and philoſophers attempting to act a part for which they were by no means qualified.

Nor does any thing that they have either ſaid or done, in the leaſt convince me, that they were not themſelves extremely ſuperſtitious. If he had not told us ſo himſelf, one could have hardly been brought to believe, that Lord Herbert, the father of the Deiſts, and the great reaſoning champion that was to deſtroy the Chriſtian ſuperſtition, was a firm believer in the *animation* of the ſtars: and though

though too acute a reaſoner to be fit to be a diſciple of Chriſt, would have made a figure as one of Cleanthes's. And this was his opinion in the only philoſophical age that the world has ever ſeen. So unfair is it to form a judgment of the entire ſtate of the human mind, by a ſolitary ray of reaſon iſſuing from it.

A man by accident may have fallen into ſome lucky train of thought, which might produce ſpeculations that would raiſe him not only above the vulgar, but even above himſelf; and make it become a point of honour with him to keep himſelf as much as poſſible above the weakneſſes of common men. But when this becomes impracticable, the character muſt be ſupported by diſſimulation; and it is only in unguarded, or very trying moments, that we loſe ſight of the philoſopher and diſcover the man; at leaſt he acts his part but indifferently, if he diſcover himſelf in his writings. Socrates ſacrifices a cock to Eſculapius, and by ſo doing proves himſelf to be as ſuperſtitious as the vulgar.

We go to conſult the antient philoſophers, with the ſame diſpoſition and turn of mind, that the vulgar go to a conjurer: we wiſh to find them of the ſame opinion that we ourſelves have adopted or wiſh to eſtabliſh; and thus contrive to make them deliver us back our own knowledge, and then wonder how they became acquainted with it; concluding that little obſcure hints, which we force a meaning upon, that never entered into the heads of the authors, ought to have reformed the whole human race. The pagan philoſophers are made to write good morality, and a rational natural Religion, by the ſame art that Auſonius makes Virgil write obſcenity.

The

The Chriſtian Religion has ſomething grand in the very manner that it ſets about reforming the world; it makes the attack upon the great maſs of the people, who began, ſupported, and ſpread the deluſions of ſuperſtition, and who were entirely out of the reach of philoſophic improvement.

The more this ſubject is examined, the more it will be found, that neither philoſophy, nor any kind of human learning could do any thing towards correcting or extirpating the vulgar ſuperſtitions, as they could ſubſtitute nothing in the room of the ſuperſtition to ſupply its place in the mind. The detection of religious impoſitions ſeems to be the only thing likely to ſtop the progreſs of ſuperſtition. Such diſcoveries, if very frequent, would run the half-thinkers, and ſuch as had received ſtrong provocation from impoſters, into a kind of occaſional atheiſm. And many people of abandoned principles would be glad to creep under ſuch a ſhelter, where they might indulge their paſſions without controul. But ſober men, and ſuch as took pains to weigh conſequences, would ſee that ſuch inferences were the effects of paſſion, and not of argument; or that what argument there was, did by no means conclude againſt religious opinions in general; for they would find that it proved nothing in fact, but that one man would cheat another when he had it in his power: and when the prejudices thus raiſed were worn away, the ſame opinions would again prevail as powerfully and extenſively as before.

Even thoſe who made objections to the moſt trifling ſuperſtitions, might expect to be anſwered in the words of Appius Claudius, or to the ſame purpoſe: "Eludant nunc licet religiones. Quid "enim eſt, ſi pulli non paſcentur? Si ex cavea

"tardius

" tardius exirent? Si occinuerit avis? Parva ſunt
" hæc: ſed parva iſta non contemnendo majores
" noſtri maximam hanc rem fecerunt."

CHAP. IV.

Of the Attributes of the Gods.

THE rule, which I mean to direct myſelf by, in this argument, is to allow every thing to be of human invention, which mankind can ſo fully comprehend, that in certain circumſtances they would neceſſarily act the ſame things over again, without any other information than what a proper exertion of their own faculties would give. Thus, I think, they might have invented language and writing, and ſeveral other things which we have good reaſon to ſuppoſe were communicated ſupernaturally to the firſt man; becauſe I feel in myſelf a power of inventing ſuch things; and it ſeems hardly worth while to diſpute whether I could have been put into a ſituation which would have forced this power to act.

Nor are our notions of the wiſdom of God in the leaſt debaſed by ſuch a conceſſion; for the invention might have taken up more time, if mankind had been left to the exertion of their natural abilities, than was conſiſtent with the circumſtances of the world, or the plan which was then carrying on; eſpecially as, by their diſperſion afterwards, they had full opportunity of exerting and diſplaying this part of their abilities.

In the ſame manner, though God revealed himſelf to the firſt man, every thing that was truly ſupernatural was loſt amidſt the general corruption which

which enſued; this introducing as great a confuſion among the moral and religious principles of mankind, as was afterwards made in their language, ſo that nothing but a few inſignificant forms remained, analogous to what a common alphabet might be in languages eſſentially different.

It is true an antiquarian might trace a connection between two nations in ſome former period, from their making uſe of a common alphabet, though the languages were totally different. And it might be ſhewn from ſacrifices, and ſome other cuſtoms, that the heathen ſuperſtition ſprung originally from the firſt revelation. But as I reaſon only upon facts that are allowed on all ſides, without pretending to eſtabliſh directly ſuch as are controverted, by unbelievers, I ſhall allow the whole of the heathen ſuperſtition to be of human invention, becauſe they retained nothing but what ſuited their fancies; and I can ſee nothing in it above the power, or more properly, the weakneſs of man.

The heathens, therefore, would have the making of their own gods; and I am now to conſider the materials that they would probably make uſe of for this purpoſe. The character of the gods would be formed according to the prejudices of mankind as to happineſs, and the uſe and occaſions which they had for their interpoſitions.

The gods could not anſwer the ends of their votaries, unleſs they were ſuppoſed able to do every thing which could be required of them; having at the ſame time every advantage which any man could wiſh for.

They would aſcribe powers and faculties to their gods, not by reaſoning from effects to cauſes; or, in other words, they would not, by conſidering what they

they had done, infer what they might do, but from prejudice and paſſion; that is, from their own wants and wiſhes they would give their gods every power and every enjoyment which their own circumſtances required, or their moſt extravagant wiſhes could ſuggeſt. Becauſe, whoever attends to the notions of the vulgar among ourſelves (and there was a time when all mankind belonged to that claſs, in point of underſtanding) will find that the powers which they conceive to belong to the ſupernatural beings of their own formation, are ſuch as every one may have been fool enough to wiſh for in ſome part of his life: the power of conveying themſelves readily from place to place; of rendering themſelves inviſible and invulnerable; a great capacity of doing miſchief, and alſo of conferring benefits and favours. The witches of the vulgar among us, ride through the air, plunge to the bottom of the ſea, and perform other feats of the ſame kind.

Mankind would make their gods omnipotent in a certain ſenſe; at leaſt the chief of the gods would be ſo. For the world would never be content with one; though it may be ſaid that the idea of many, ſuppoſes firſt the idea of one: but mankind could never be ſuppoſed to reſt here, unleſs a man could be ſuppoſed to place his confidence for ſupport and protection in one rather than in a multitude, and prefer a ſolitary ſituation to the mirth and jollity of ſociety.

The chief of the gods therefore (for there would undoubtedly be a chief) would have abſolute power over gods and men, as far as was conſiſtent with the nature of ſuch *beings*: In ſhort, he could do what Homer allows to Jupiter, or rather what Jupiter takes to himſelf in the beginning of the eighth

eighth book of the Iliad. And I conſider Homer as much better authority for the natural and generally received attributes of the gods, than any philoſopher whatever; for what this poet delivers was certainly the general opinion upon theſe ſubjects; nor is it to be imagined, that an author who has repreſented his human characters with ſuch propriety, would have done leſs juſtice to his gods.

Inſtead of being at the trouble of going ſo very high as refined ſpeculations, for diſcovering the ſource of the notions, which the heathens had of their gods, it even appears that we ſhall not be much out of our way, in ſuppoſing that they copied them directly from the great and rich men of this world, with ſuch an increaſe of power as their nature and ſituation gave them. And if theſe notions were once eſtabliſhed, legiſlators would labour in vain to remove them, even when they felt their pernicious effects in a ſociety. For as Cato ſays in Livy, "Nihil enim in ſpeciem fallacius eſt quam prava religio; ubi Deorum numen prætenditur ſceleribus, ſubit animum timor, ne fraudibus humanis vindicandis, divini juris aliquid immixtum violemus." Here it is to be obſerved, that the wickedneſs of the action could not be alledged as any proof that it was not committed by their gods; for the ſtreſs is not laid upon the *ſcelus*, but upon the *fraus humana:* if the gods did the wicked action there was no help, nor did they run any hazard of loſing their character; or rather from the expreſſion *divini juris*, it ſeems as if the Romans conſidered the committing of wicked actions as a part of the privileges of the gods. And ſo far would this prejudice be carried, that I am perſuaded it would be in vain to look for morality as making any part of the character

of the heathen gods. Nor is it probable that Cicero, who was a very religious man, intends any reflection upon Jupiter, when he ſays of Clodius, with a ſneer, that he might call himſelf Jupiter, becauſe he had his ſiſter for his wife.

It would be impoſſible for men to live together in ſociety, unleſs they had the ſame general notions of morality; and the rules derived from the moſt obvious and neceſſary of theſe, would make the very terms of their union, and which they muſt agree to preſerve inviolate, or ruin would be the conſequence; though each individual might, upon occaſion, look upon the obſervance of ſuch rules as a great hardſhip; and would, in all probability, endeavour to confine the obſervance of them to as narrow limits as poſſible: as for inſtance, firſt to his own ſociety, regarding himſelf as excuſed from the obſervance of them, when any member of another ſociety was concerned, eſpecially where it could be done with impunity. And notwithſtanding this privilege, he would find his morality ſtill too heavy for him, without ſome farther indulgences: and accordingly he would eaſily get the better of many ſcruples where his inferiors were concerned; who would be obliged to yield from a ſenſe of inferiority and want of protection.

This liberty of relaxing his rules of morality, every man would certainly conſider as an advantage, and a total exemption of courſe, he would regard as the greateſt privilege; "Qui nolunt "occidere quenquam poſſe volunt." It is not therefore to be imagined, that mankind would degrade their notions of the gods, by annexing to their character ſuch a troubleſome thing as morality.

Without

Without paſſions, according to vulgar conception there could be no enjoyment; and this enjoyment would be confined to the gratification of paſſions, reſembling the moſt turbulent of their own: and a *Being* who could not indulge his paſſions, could never come up to the vulgar idea of a god.

A heathen god, therefore, is exempted from being a moral agent ſtrictly ſpeaking, though he might be obliged to conform to ſome rules among his own fraternity, and be liable to have ſome demands of gratitude made upon him for the aſſiduous attendance and reſpect of mortals. And the ſyſtem of Epicurus, which I think is abſurdly conſidered as a ſyſtem of Atheiſm, is only the refinement and farther proſecution of the ſame principles, carried indeed ſo far as to be inconſiſtent with the very ends of all religion. Laertius commends Epicurus for many virtues, particularly for his piety and devotion towards the gods: in which I can eaſily conceive he might be ſincere, for I ſee juſt as good a foundation for his piety, as for his natural philoſophy; both of which are only inſtances of the extravagance and inconſiſtency of the human mind.

We may therefore hold it for a rule, that while the power of the gods remained unqueſtionable, their morality would never be inquired into. And borrowing all their notions from the ſame ſource, men would very naturally aſcribe to the gods all the capricious foibles of the rich and powerful. And to this purpoſe, there is a remarkable paſſage in Valerius Maximus; it is the reflection which he makes upon the religious exerciſes of the Romans, which they performed after the battle of Cannæ,

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in the following words: "Qua quidem conſtantia "obtinendæ religionis, magnus injectus eſt cœ- "leſtibus *rubor* ulterius adverſus eam ſæviendi "gentem; quæ ne injuriarum quidem acerbitate "ab eorum cultu abſterreri poterat." And when we add concerning this boaſted devotion, that a part of it, as we learn from Livy, conſiſted in the ſacrifice of two men and two women, it will not greatly raiſe our notions of the morality of the heathen gods.

And this will enable us to account for a wonderful circumſtance in the heathen creed, namely, that the moſt devout never ſuppoſed their own moral actions could influence their deities. Politicians and moraliſts made many attempts to graft ſomething of morality upon the common ſuperſtitions, but the ſtock was ſo unnatural, that it never produced any fruit. Their prieſts told them that they muſt ſacrifice ſuch a victim, which muſt be killed in ſuch a place, in ſuch a manner, and with ſuch a knife; but not a word is to be found of their promiſing them the favour of the gods, if they repented of their ſins, and led better lives.

Now this being the character of the gods, and as men chuſe to have as many friends as poſſible among the great, ſo a number of divinities would be the wiſh of the multitude; and the number of the gods would be alſo increaſed, according to the notion which they had of their power and dignity; ſome offices would be too mean and inconſiſtent with the rank of ſome gods, which is very evident from the heathen *mythology*; and likewiſe they would increaſe their number, not chuſing to overload them with a multiplicity of affairs, which might diſtract their attention, or interrupt them in the courſe of their pleaſures or amuſements.

Abſurd as theſe notions may appear to be, and certainly are, whoever examines human nature attentively, will nevertheleſs ſee reaſon to think them juſt. We who have the advantage of the light diffuſed through the world by the Chriſtian Religion, form a very wrong eſtimate of the human character upon ſuch ſubjects as theſe; and will not allow ourſelves to ſee into half its weakneſſes; for where fear and uncertainty both take place and aſſault the mind, it is aſtoniſhing what idiots mankind are, and what extravagant imaginations they will adopt for truth. Nothing but the Chriſtian Religion can, or ought, to drive ſuch phantoms from the minds of men. Human nature wants their aid, impotent as they are; nor can any degree of knowledge, which we are capable of acquiring naturally, ſupply their place. And I am well perſuaded that many of the heathens, even the wiſeſt of them, were really in earneſt, when it has been ſuppoſed that they were acting a part, and humouring the vulgar. The vulgar, which properly ſpeaking, includes every body, and who have been the inſtruments of making and unmaking all the idols in the world, according as they have been inſtructed or miſled. So that a knowledge which was not in ſome way or other ſuited to their capacity, could bring about no great revolution or reformation in human affairs. The opinions of the philoſophers were only a cloak to conceal their ignorance; and if they were able to ſupport an opinion of greater knowledge, this was all that they deſired: Real knowledge was never communicated by mankind in the form of myſtery; when we have made a real diſcovery, we are even anxious that all the world ſhould know it.

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When the Chriſtian Religion had entirely deſtroyed the heathen gods, the different ſects of philoſophers joined in the triumph, particularly the Epicureans, and ſeem to put on an appearance of independence, by new modelling their ſyſtems, with the aſſiſtance of this light.

The human mind is not capable of receiving ſuch contradictions, as that a thing ſhould be longer and ſhorter at the ſame time than another thing; but it is very capable of reconciling the reaſonings of Plato, or even of Epicurus, with the gods of the vulgar.

From the light which we have got at preſent, we may be able to ſhew, that many things are abſurd and inconſiſtent, two of which ought not to be believed at the ſame time; yet it will by no means follow that they were not both univerſally believed. If you invent philoſophic principles, which in their conſequences ought to deſtroy certain ſuperſtitions, the hopes and fears of mankind, and perhaps your own hopes and fears, will bid defiance to the conſequences.

Even while a man is labouring to overturn one ſpecies of ſuperſtition, he may not have leiſure to conſider, what other kinds he is expoſing himſelf to if he ſucceed. And if he were aſked, ſuppoſing his work compleated, what he meant to ſubſtitute in its ſtead? He might be very much puzzled with conſequences, whether he anſwered ſomething or nothing.

The truth is, the faculties and circumſtances of men require ſomething, and no one has a right or authority to ſubſtitute his viſions in preference to thoſe of others; or if they were ſubſtituted, they would be but new modes of ſuperſtition, it being above human power to apply the proper remedy to this infirmity.

CHAP. V.

Of the Religious Principles of the Jews.

THE account, which has been here given of the religious opinions of mankind, will be found to be agreeable to experience, as far as the nature of this argument requires, without any exception, ſpeaking of bodies of men or nations, but the people of the Jews; and probably upon a nearer inſpection, even they will ſerve to confirm this reaſoning, at the ſame time that they ſtand an exception to the concluſion drawn from it.

I have conſidered ſuch opinions as flowing naturally from the joint operation of our faculties and circumſtances in this world, and conſequently incapable of reformation by any human power, though it is the very nature of ſuch opinions to be unſtable, and variable, and continually ſhifting from one abſurdity to another. And the probabilities, poſſibilities, inconſiſtencies, contradictions, and imaginary principles of the different ſects of philoſophers, were leaſt of all likely to fix the opinions of mankind. If the Jews had dealt in the ſame kind of principles, even if the whole nation had equalled the refinement of the moſt acute philoſophers, I never ſhould have thought it neceſſary to conſider them as a diſtinct claſs of men from the reſt of the world.

But we find among the Jews a poſitive aſſertion, that there is only one God, the Creator, the Maker, the Preſerver of every thing: Eternal as to his duration; Omnipotent as to his power; and eſſentially preſent every where: lording it over

over every thing according to his will and pleaſure, yet executing every thing according to infinite power, wiſdom, goodneſs and juſtice: No reſpecter of perſons, but, without caprice or partiality, rewarding every one according to his deeds. Not even the poſſibility, much leſs the ſlighteſt probability of the interference, or the exiſtence of any other god is allowed in the Jewiſh ſcheme of Religion.

But do theſe ſublime, and as I may call them, unnatural truths, appear to be the fruits of the ſpeculations and obſervations of this people? By no means, quite the contrary: for every circumſtance in their hiſtory confirms us in a different opinion. Nay, ſo far was this from being a natural ſentiment, that it required very extraordinary, or rather ſupernatural means, to impreſs them with it at firſt, and preſerve it among them afterwards, even when delivered as the moſt important of all truths.

And indeed, ſo remarkably ſingular did their opinions and behaviour appear to thoſe who contented themſelves with a ſuperficial view of the jewiſh policy, that they could hardly believe the Jews to be of the ſame ſpecies with the reſt of mankind. And this ſeems to have been the opinion of every nation who knew them, founded upon that unſociable diſpoſition, which made it impoſſible for them to incorporate with the reſt of mankind.

Antiquity was well acquainted with their opinions and character, as far as they choſe to inform themſelves, or rather as far as their prejudices would ſuffer them to receive information. And it was not for want of opportunity, but becauſe they had not abilities to comprehend it, that ſuch a pure ſyſtem of *Theiſm*, or what has been abſurdly called

natural Religion, had no effect towards curing the antients of their ſuperſtitions. Nay, the reſt of mankind received the principles and pretenſions of the Jews not with a bare indifference, much leſs with the ſpirit of philoſophers, but with the moſt abſurd and malignant interpretation, which the moſt outrageous prejudice could invent.

Nor is this by any means to be wondered at, according to the view of the ſubject which I have taken, but is rather to be expected, ſince ſuch opinions proceeded from nothing in human nature, and conſequently muſt have been unintelligible to thoſe who truſted entirely to that for their guide. Such of the antients as might be diſpoſed to examine them, would conſider opinions ſo very different from their own, as the effect of ſome capricious humour in this people; and inſtead of regarding the poſitive and conſiſtent nature of this Religion, as the marks of a conviction derived from extraordinary evidence, they would ſuppoſe it the fruits of an obſtinate temper, which led them to contradict the Reaſon, Feelings, and Religion of the reſt of mankind. And meaſuring every thing by their own unſettled notions, the beſt eſtabliſhed truths would appear the moſt unreaſonable.

The patrons of what is called natural Religion, ought to read with aſtoniſhment thoſe parts of Tacitus in which he treats with the greateſt indifference, or rather contempt, the religious opinions of the Jews. This man of a philoſophic turn of mind, gives the following account of the Jewiſh Religion; "Judæi (ſays he) mente ſola, "unumque numen intelligunt. Profanos qui "Deûm imagines, mortalibus materiis, in ſpe-"ciem hominis effingunt. Summum illud et "æternum,

" æternum, neque mutabile neque interiturum. " Igitur nulla ſimulacra urbibus ſuis, nedum " templis ſunt." And the reaſon which he gives for their adopting theſe ſimple and elevated notions ſo worthy of the Deity, and ſo agreeable to right reaſon, ſhew the powerful effects of prejudice over the minds of men of the greateſt abilities; and that all men, when carried beyond the little circle of their knowledge, are as it were carried back to their infant ſtate, with this only difference, that they have loſt their teachable diſpoſition.

The heathen deities, according to Tacitus, are not forſaken by the Jews, upon any rational conviction of the falſity and abſurdity of idolatry and ſuperſtition: for it ſeems they had no better reaſon to induce them to change their religious opinions, and take up thoſe juſt now mentioned (which this author ſeems to look upon, as a kind of Atheiſm) than this, that Moſes adviſes them to forſake both gods and men, becauſe they themſelves were abandoned by both. For he adds, " Plurimi auctores " conſentiunt, ut orta per Ægyptum tabe quæ " corpora fœdaret, regem Ocharin, adito Hammonis oraculo, remidium petentem, purgare " regnum; et id genus hominum, ut inviſum " diis, alias in terras avehere juſſum. Sic conquæſitum collectumque vulgus, poſtquam vaſtis " locis relictum ſit, ceteris per lacrymas torpentibus, Moſen, unum exulum, monuiſſe ne " quam deorum hominumve opem expectarent, " ab utriſque deſerti, ſed ſibimet ut duci cœleſti " crederent, primo cujus auxilio credentes, preſentes miſerias pepuliſſent."

According to this account it might be expected, that Moſes would either aboliſh all religious cere-

monies, and eſtabliſh a nation of Atheiſts, or elſe take ſuch meaſures as would put all things in readineſs for his own *Apotheoſis*. However, this it ſeems was not the caſe; for he adds, "Moſes "quo ſibi in poſterum gentem firmaret, novos "ritus, contrarioſque cæteris mortalibus indidit. "Profana illic omnia quæ apud nos ſacra. Rurſum "conceſſa apud illos quæ nobis inceſta."

Here we ſee, in as clear a manner as words can expreſs it, that this author, though one of the acuteſt of antiquity, has no conception of the truth, ſimplicity, and ſublimity of the Jewiſh Religion; but imagines that it was the invention of a man, not even himſelf convinced of its truth, nor ſenſible of its purity and ſublimity: who adopted it not from reaſon, or plauſibility, or any intrinſic merit or fitneſs in the opinons themſelves to anſwer any ends which he might have in view; but he adopted them from a ſpirit of contradiction, in a ſplenetic humour, merely out of oppoſition to other nations, who held the Jews in deteſtation for theſe very principles. Which makes it highly improbable that the heathens could have ſhaken off their idolatry and ſuperſtition, by the aſſiſtance of any natural means, even by the greateſt degree of cultivation of which the human faculties are capable without ſupernatural aſſiſtance: for the man who firſt did it would have been regarded as a perſon of a deſpicable and abandoned character: As the ſame author ſays, ſpeaking of the ſame people, and the ſame religious principles, that it was only the moſt profligate and unprincipled who adopted ſuch opinions. "Nam peſſi-"mus quiſque, ſpretis religionibus patriis, tribu-"ta et ſtipes illuc congerebant." And again, "Tranſgreſſi in morem eorum, idem uſurpant,

"nec

" nec quidquam prius imbuuntur quam contem-" nere deos, &c." So that we find this contempt of the gods conſtantly inſiſted on, as the circumſtance upon which the chief ſtreſs is laid: and it appears of itſelf of ſuch weight, as to determine this author to conclude that thoſe, who became converts to ſuch opinions, were loſt to every thing that is good.

Tacitus, perhaps, might have been able to accommodate his reaſon to the principles of Epicurus, and think that he was paying a compliment to the gods, by taking the government of the world out of their hands; but his prejudices could not bear that contempt of them, which is the very firſt ſtep to a proper knowledge of the true God. But here ſome pert infidel will be apt to interrupt me, by aſking, can I believe that a politician ſo very acute could be liable to ſo much weakneſs? Why not: when this very ſame politician has given us a proof of the moſt contemptible weakneſs, beſides ſhewing himſelf to be a ſlave to the loweſt vulgar prejudice, in his pretence to aſſign a cauſe for the length of our days in ſummer. And the ſame excuſe for his abſurdity would ſerve upon both ſubjects; namely, that he was ignorant of the true principles of Religion and Aſtronomy.

Thoſe who had nothing but the common ſuperficial obſervation to direct them, and who looked at the Jews through ſuch a thick miſt of prejudice, had no other concluſion to draw, but that they were a different ſpecies from the reſt of the human race. And yet if we turn to their hiſtory, as we have it authentic in the Bible, they will appear to be the ſame kind of men with the reſt of the world, yet deſerving the moſt ſerious attention of all mankind.

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In this hiſtory, it is eaſy to be ſeen that they are exactly of the ſame diſpoſition with the reſt of the world, and at leaſt as prone to idolatry as their neighbours; becauſe it requires ſupernatural efforts frequently repeated to bring them to a ſenſe of their ſituation, which they never rightly underſtood, and to preſerve thoſe important truths communicated to them, and which they were to be the means of preſerving, and communicating to the world at a time appointed. Nay, thoſe who will read with care, the awful threatnings, and actual interpoſitions of heaven, muſt be ſurpriſed to find that they had no greater effect; as they were, by no means, ſufficient for keeping this nation from falling into all the idolatrous and ſuperſtitious practices of their neighbours.

Nor was it the mere vulgar only who had occaſion to be thus reſtrained; but the very wiſeſt of all their kings falls into the ſame ſnare; which, beſides proving many other things, clears this plan of all ſuſpicion of human contrivance; as one of its greateſt viſible ſupporters as a king and an inſpired writer, deſerts his charge, and falls in with the abominations of the nations.

The great and conſtant care taken to keep the Jews from mixing with ſtrangers, and that even this was often ineffectual, proves how natural the groſſeſt kinds of ſuperſtition are to the human mind. When it is ſeen that the immediate preſence of the Deity in ſigns and wonders, and exemplary puniſhments, could not keep this people to right principles, and preſerve them from the infection of idolatry. And ſurely this is ſufficient to prove that proper notions of God and his attributes, are beyond the power of man to attain to, by any effort of his own; or even if they were delivered

to him as the truths of natural Religion, that his circumſtances and his paſſions, would be leading him daily to pervert and corrupt them.

In affairs which come properly within our power, mankind make a very reſpectable figure: there is a progreſs and variety in the world as to government, arts, and ſciences; even human actions and events are connected together, and follow conſequentially, leading from ſmall and inſenſible beginnings, to ſuch concluſions and improvements, as could never have been expected or imagined. Here the human race ſhew that they have been in action, and that what has been done, muſt have been the work of time and opportunity; the employment of many hands, and the invention of many heads. But when we turn to the ſubject of Religion, we even diſcover a barrenneſs of invention, and a poverty of imagination, and inſtead of variety and connexion, a number of dull, ſenſeleſs, detached conceits, which might have been the conception of a moment, and the ſimultaneous production of a diſtempered imagination. Human nature ſeems ſo completely exhauſted by the birth of ſuch a *monſter*, that ſhe has no farther power to provide for this offſpring of hers, than by beſtowing upon it ſome of the worſt of her own paſſions.

THE END OF THE FIRST BOOK.

BOOK

BOOK II.

Containing a Philoſophical Eſtimate of the Situation and Circumſtances of Men, as to temporal Advantages, by conſidering them as under the Protection, though Subject to the arbitrary Diſpoſal of God.

CHAP. I.

The Idea of this Book.

A Philoſophical inquiry may be carried on upon different principles, and with a view to anſwer different ends.

The queſtion may be, Is the effect an adequate meaſure for the cauſe aſſigned, ſo that in ſubjects of computation the one may be ſubſtituted for the other? And whenever this can be ſhewn to be the caſe, I conceive the diſcovery to be within the reach of the human faculties. But it is to be obſerved, before this can be done with propriety, that the cauſe muſt be ſuch as can produce that effect only, and neither one greater or leſs; that is, the cauſe muſt exhauſt itſelf in the effect, and cannot avoid exhauſting itſelf, otherwiſe it would be impoſſible to draw any certain concluſions. To prove ſupernatural things to be cauſe and effect in this manner, would be to deſtroy all diſtinction between natural and ſupernatural events: as the effects produced

duced would not be the voluntary act of any agent, but would follow neceſſarily from ſome determinate ſyſtem of things: and then the diſcovery of any ſuch operations ought not to be conſidered as a revelation, ſeeing it would depend upon the accidental or intentional placing the cauſe in the ſituation proper for producing its effects.

A certain quantity of water will move a certain machine; the reſiſtance of the machine is a proper meaſure for the force of the water: a certain ſpace of ground produces a certain quantity of grain; the quantity of grain is a meaſure for the fruitful force of the ground, and ſo in other inſtances. Such diſcoveries increaſe the powers of man, and give him a kind of command over nature, by putting him in a certain degree into a ſtate of independence. And this makes us wiſh to reduce every thing to this kind of knowledge, being in hopes of acquiring, as it were, a little dominion of our own, where we might have nothing to fear but mechanical cauſes and their neceſſary conſequences.

A little experimenting philoſopher, by drawing a few ſparks from an *electrical machine*, takes up the conceit that he has diſarmed heaven of its thunder, and thinks the moſt prudent thing the world can do is to renounce the protection of God, and put themſelves under his. If we were careful to make a proper eſtimate of our knowledge, we would ſtifle in their birth, a number of ſuch little, impious conceits, which are produced by the force of novelty inſtead of demonſtration. For as far as my experience reaches, I find knowledge deſpiſed in proportion to its certainty. Whether it be that the human imagination muſt have ſomething to work upon, and would be entirely out of its element in a ſtate of

certainty,

certainty, or whether it ariſes from a reſtleſsneſs of mind, which will not ſuffer us to be contented in any condition. However this may be, it is my opinion, that, if we were rendered independent of all the *material* agents in the univerſe, there is fuel enough in the human paſſions to ſet the world in a flame, and diſturb the peace of individuals and whole ſocieties.

But the very ſerious part which every one feels he has aſſigned him, joined to the ſmall progreſs which has been made in tracing effects to their real cauſes, obliges us to give up ſuch conceits of independence, and view the univerſe in a very different light from a machine, which may be taken to pieces, and put together again by human power, or even by human imagination. And this ſenſe of our weakneſs, gives riſe to another kind of philoſophical inquiry, which directly adds nothing to our command over nature, but rather ſhews us how dependent we are: and is particularly uſeful for giving us a command over ourſelves, and eſpecially neceſſary for our circumſtances and ſituation in the world.

This inquiry does not conſiſt in an attempt to diſcover the cauſes of things, ſo as to meaſure the cauſes and effects by each other; but rather, taking the facts as we find them, without inquiring into the mode of making things, to content ourſelves with forming a character of the cauſe or cauſes that produced them: and this is all that can be done when the cauſe is a free agent: becauſe a deſigning intelligent cauſe can never be inveſtigated to perfection by its effects. To pretend that it can produce nothing but what it has produced, and muſt produce at ſtated times; or ſuch things as follow by way of natural conſequence, deſtroys every idea of deſign or intelligence, unleſs we ſhould

ſhould ſuppoſe the cauſe ſo impotent as to have its effects counteracted by the nature of things, or the power of man; and thus confined to certain limits, and a certain manner of acting. But inſtead of pretending to comprehend the *Supreme Being* in this manner, a man will often find occaſion to repent of his raſhneſs, in being too confident that he could thus comprehend his fellow-creatures.

We may examine whether, to the beſt of our apprehenſion, there is that conſiſtency among the things of this world, that they can ſtand together as parts of the ſame plan; and alſo whether they have ſuch a harmony with the feelings and faculties of mankind, as to create in us a great degree of pleaſure: for if this be true, it ought to lead us to conclude, that we were not overlooked in the contrivance of this mighty fabric of the univerſe. However, we ought conſtantly to keep in mind, what almoſt every thing tends to teach us, that our buſineſs in this world is not to look for palaces, but to ſeek for ſhelter from the ſtorm which the turbulence of our paſſions, and the weakneſs of our underſtanding have raiſed.

To be obliged to live in a world with every thing contradicting our ſenſes and feelings, if it failed to produce idiotiſm, would be a ſtate of abſolute torment; though to other *beings* of a different ſpecies, every thing might appear to be diſpoſed according to the greateſt wiſdom and regularity. Our opinions, therefore, upon ſuch a ſubject as the attributes of God when in ſuch circumſtances, though they would be melancholy truths to us, yet would they be relative to our views and ſenſations, rather than to the real nature of things, and might lead us to fix a general character upon the Author of nature which he did not deſerve.

Nay,

Nay, if we were only ignorant of our *original* and *deſtination*, many things might be diſagreeable to us as ſenſible creatures, which would appear to be wiſe and good, when the ends which they were to anſwer came to be known and underſtood. And all this might depend upon our being *arbitrarily* placed in certain circumſtances, which could neither be foreſeen nor inferred from any thing, having no other cauſe but the bare ſovereign will and pleaſure of the Author of nature.

And this conſideration takes the ſubject entirely out of our hands, and reduces us to the character and office of *ſpectators*, who can only take ſuch a view of the univerſe as it has pleaſed God to preſent to us, and indulge us with faculties to comprehend. And the great probability that this is true, ought to convince us that any ſyſtem which we can build, would reſt upon too ſandy a foundation to give us the leaſt encouragement to be confident or dogmatical. A ſenſible creature fixing abſolute truth, is the man with his candle examining the ſun-dial to diſcover the hour of the night.

In the laſt book I have obſerved how unfit we are naturally, from our paſſions and circumſtances, even to form a character of the cauſes which produce the different effects in this world, particularly ſuch as more immediately concern ourſelves. The gods into whoſe hands the heathens delivered up the government of the univerſe, are imaginary and impotent, and their characters immoral, contradictory and abſurd; and yet in certain circumſtances, ſuch is the weakneſs of human nature, the wiſeſt men put themſelves under their protection.

Mankind are diſpoſed in ſpeculation to extend their reaſon very far, but in practice they always contract

contract it to its natural and narrow limits; and upon the moſt important and preſſing occaſions abandon it entirely. We may be truſted with the choice of our food, or to ſettle the proportions and dimenſions of our habitations; but we require a ſupernatural direction and information, when our own character, and that of the Supreme Being, is the ſubject of our conſideration. And as God has condeſcended to reveal to us both his own character and ours, in as far as we are concerned, it will be much to our comfort and advantage, to take a view of ourſelves and the univerſe, aſſiſted by this new light. But as a gradual emerſion from our natural darkneſs, ſeems to agree better with our faculties, and will ſhock our prejudices leſs than a ſudden ſally into broad day-light, I propoſe in this book to conſider the general revealed character of God, and the real poſitive, preſent and temporal advantages which we enjoy by being under the protection, though ſubject to the government, and left to the arbitrary diſpoſal of God. And although the fact and truth will remain the ſame, whatever may be the reſult of our ſpeculations, yet if we ſee reaſon to be content with our ſituation, and diſcover rational grounds for future hopes, the change will be very conſiderable in ourſelves, as ſuch meditations will prepare the mind for receiving the evidence of the Chriſtian Religion with leſs prejudice; and are beſides of wonderful ſervice for enabling a man to regulate his own imaginations, which, if not reſtrained within proper bounds, are capable, in certain circumſtances, of doing infinite miſchief to himſelf and the world, whether he acts the Atheiſt or the Enthuſiaſt.

CHAP. II.

Containing ſome general Obſervations upon the Manner in which it has pleaſed God to reveal himſelf to the World.

WE find in the hiſtory of the Jews, that they were taught to believe in one God only, who is repreſented as the Creator and Preſerver of the whole Univerſe, infinitely powerful, wiſe, good and juſt, acting through all ages and every where without reſtraint or controul. But we find at the ſame time, that theſe principles were not diſcovered or communicated to the Jewiſh nation, in the ſame manner as we are taught or diſcover ſuch things as human reaſon and ingenuity, aided by the common appearances and accidents of the world, may diſcover, invent, and communicate.

It is delivered as a fact by Moſes, that God had revealed himſelf to him, in a manner, which conveyed an information to his mind, of the ſame kind as that which one man receives from another by words, to diſtinguiſh it from that kind of knowledge which we acquire conſequentially. It is true the reſt of the Jews were kept at a greater diſtance; and yet they were not left to general conſequential reaſoning; and therefore Moſes does not prepare them to expect arguments only in the way of ſcientific inference, as proofs of his aſſertions; but to look for a full and ſenſible confirmation of them in the ſigns and wonders which were to be exhibited; which would be ſuited to, and demonſtrative, of the character which God had aſſumed to himſelf. And the whole Jewiſh po-

lity may be regarded as contrived by God, on purpoſe to give a proper diſplay of his character to mankind. And in the courſe of the hiſtory of the Iſraelites, we have his unity, power, wiſdom, goodneſs and juſtice aſſerted and proved by facts; but chiefly that he has a will, or is a free agent in the moſt extenſive ſenſe of the word, acting by no neceſſity either of nature or principle, but according to his own ſovereign will and pleaſure.

When the Jews neglected or diſregarded thoſe important truths, their attention was not called to the common arguments of reaſon to convince them of their miſtake, or as grounds for cenſuring and puniſhing them for their neglect; but their paſſions were applied to and alarmed by ſigns and wonders addreſſed immediately to their ſenſes. The power of God was not left to reach their minds as it might appear in argumentative conſequences, from the general plan of the world, but was majeſtically exhibited to their ſenſes, and by them conveyed directly to their minds by an occaſional exertion of his almighty power. And theſe were ſo frequent, and ſo well eſtabliſhed among this people, as to form a regular habit of thinking, in the ſame manner as our education leads us to wiſh for a certain habitual form of argument upon which we have been taught to ground our conviction. The Jews ſought after a ſign, juſt as naturally as the Greeks expected ſyſtematical reaſoning.

And notwithſtanding what has been ſaid to the contrary, ſuch an evidence as this which the Jews received ſeems abſolutely neceſſary; for the preſent world which is at enmity with God could furniſh nothing adequate to this purpoſe. For properly ſpeaking, it was ſuch arguments as tend to prove that there are gods which miſled mankind, for they

never ſeem to have been blind to the common arguments of natural Religion. It was the exiſtence of one God only, with a particular character, of which they needed to be informed and convinced: and this conviction human reaſon, fettered as we find it by human paſſions, and blinded by prejudices, never could attain to, nor indeed even bear it after it was diſcovered, as appears remarkably in the caſe of the Jews, who have it forced upon them by irreſiſtible evidence contrary to their inclinations. God's dealings with them is not to bring them to a conviction or belief, that there are ſome god or gods; but to cure them, and the whole world by their example, of that natural propenſity which all mankind have to idolatry. "I am the Lord, and there is none elſe," is the doctrine conſtantly inſiſted on: and that this doctrine is true, is proved to them by ſigns and wonders: that as they were convinced by the appearances of nature, and their own ſenſations and reflections, that there muſt be gods, or active and intelligent natures, producing, directing, and influencing the things of this world, whom for want of information they endued with paſſions fitted to the groſſneſs of their own conceptions and wiſhes, ſo the only poſſible means by which this prejudice could be removed, would be by exhibiting a ſtronger evidence in proof that there was but one God of ſuch a particular character.

And it is this character which mankind diſlike, as they can have no proſpect of indulging their paſſions, or gratifying their particular evil humours while the government of the univerſe is in ſuch hands. The heathens heard with pleaſure every ſtory in which their gods were repreſented as capricious, and without morality. We have a dread

dread of perfection from a conſciouſneſs of our own infirmity: and provided he had ſufficient power to protect us, we would place ourſelves under the government of a man ſubject to paſſions like our own, inſtead of chuſing a perfect character, who would curb our paſſions, and be a critique upon our conduct.

The Supreme Being may be conſidered in the plan of Religion, as creating a new world, and exhibiting it for the inſpection, information, and conviction of mankind, upon a ſubject to which they are naturally ſo averſe, and in which they alone of all this lower creation are any way intereſted. A world in which this nation of the Jews were at firſt to be the principal actors, ſtrongly ſupported and carried through all dangers and difficulties; and theſe not ſuch as fall in the way of the generality of mankind; but which this people were evidently led into for a particular purpoſe. And yet every thing yields before them, without almoſt any effort of their own, or rather to efforts which, according to the regular courſe of human affairs, were totally inadequate to the purpoſes intended and the effects produced.

But this world of Religion is not made after the model of the natural world, which came completely into being at once *by the word of his power*; and as ſoon as God had ſaid *let there be light*, all its parts were fit for the inſpection of men. Religion has a gradual progreſs, proceeding from ſmall and obſcure beginnings, and growing up to perfection by degrees, which ſhews that God can perform his work ſlowly and in time, as well as inſtantaneouſly; and this work is not yet prepared for human comprehenſion, being a plan that the angels deſire to exerciſe their ſpeculations upon.

The reaſonings from final cauſes and the fitneſs of things, as exhibited in the material world, will give us no information upon this ſubject, even if the plans were entirely ſimilar; unleſs one could ſay, that a man by reading the hiſtory of the Jews, was qualified to write the hiſtory of England without any other materials. It is true the general attributes of power, wiſdom and goodneſs, are deeply marked in what exiſts, and is exhibited to us every day; but, unleſs we could be ſatisfied with the preſent moment, we are left to gueſs and conjecture about our future condition. And the wiſeſt of the heathens furniſh us full proof how diſtant theſe gueſſes and conjectures would be from the real matter of fact.

The arguments for a providence and the final cauſes of things, is as full in Cicero's book *De natura Deorum*, as can be deſired; and it does not appear to me, ſetting aſide what has been borrowed from revelation, that any thing really new has been added to the argument ſince: and therefore ſome people have imagined, from the conviction that they themſelves have found from this reaſoning, that many important queſtions might be determined and finally ſettled among mankind, independent of revelation.

But they ought to have drawn a quite contrary concluſion: for as theſe arguments in fact did not ſettle the opinions of the antients upon ſuch ſubjects, they ſhould have rather inferred that ſuch arguments of themſelves are incapable of fixing the opinions of men.

We deceive ourſelves upon ſuch queſtions: the mind is wonderfully prepared by revelation to liſten with attention, and I may even ſay with prejudice to this argument, and a conviction, which

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if accurately traced to its ſource, will be found to ſpring from revelation, we are very well diſpoſed to conſider as produced by an effort of our own underſtanding, and this is a weakneſs which the infidels themſelves are particularly ſubject to.

It is the antients alone who could feel the force of ſuch arguments, uninfluenced by any other principles: and Cicero owns that they never produced a ſolid and determinate conviction, either in himſelf or any of his cotemporaries, upon the moſt important and neceſſary points: for their minds were bewildered amidſt probabilities and abſurdities; which left them to chuſe not what was true, but what was moſt probable or leaſt abſurd. And as they had no facts to build upon, they were forced to ſhare the deſigns and contrivances of the affairs of this world, and the preſervation and regulation of things among a number of *divinities*.

The Chriſtian Religion, if it has not every where made mankind believers, yet it has extinguiſhed idolatry and ſuperſtition, in the antient ſenſe of theſe words, wherever it has been received. And this makes a material difference between us and the heathens, even when we are examining the ſame queſtion, by the ſame light, and upon the ſame principles, becauſe many prejudices are removed out of our way, which they found it impoſſible to conquer. And therefore revelation, whether true or falſe, has been of great ſervice to the world, and even to the infidels themſelves, for which they ought to make proper acknowledgements, by leaving them only a ſingle prejudice to combat, inſtead of ſuch a multitude as preſented themſelves to an infidel in the ages of idolatry; inſtead of the labours of Hercules, they have got things reduced to the wiſh of Caligula.

CHAP. III.

Of the Power of God.

THE firſt thing which we find aſcribed to God, is a creative power. He made every thing out of nothing, not in the way of natural generation, nor as a cauſe produces its effects, ſo that in the ſame circumſtances the ſame effects muſt neceſſarily be produced; or in other words, not by the miniſtry of ſecond cauſes; but he made every thing, as it is expreſſed, by the word of his power. This expreſſion, though it does not teach us how to make a world, yet appears to me highly proper for correcting thoſe errors which we naturally fall into upon this ſubject. For it conveys to us very diſtinctly the idea, that the making of the univerſe was an arbitrary act, and not performed from neceſſity, nor according to any eternal relations, ſo as to be a work of contrivance in fitting and adjuſting means to ends; but that the things and their relations came into exiſtence together: or more accurately, perhaps, that the relations were poſterior to the things. It ſeems to me impious to ſuppoſe that there were laws of gravitation, and that God placed and adjuſted the material worlds according to thoſe laws. I know the general prejudices and habits of mankind are againſt this opinion; becauſe this is a power of which we can have no experimental proof, and for this reaſon the thing itſelf is beyond human conception, and conſequently the notion itſelf is not likely to be of human invention.

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But this power of creation, though it can make and deſtroy ourſelves and every thing elſe, is not what is apt to fill the mind with the greateſt dread and terror; becauſe we are not ſufficiently acquainted with it, or its operations, to derive matter of fear from them. Yet in the operations of natural things, we meet with ſuch conſtant exertions of deſtructive power, as might be ſufficient to drive to diſtraction ſuch a *being* as man, ſo ſenſible of his ſituation, and ſo liable to accidents. And therefore we may naturally imagine that this attribute of God, would be the firſt to make a deep impreſſion upon mankind. We may make our firſt notions upon this ſubject, more rational and conſiſtent with the other parts of the character of the Supreme Being, but we can ſcarcely enlarge them ſo as to make this attribute of power an object of greater terror. Man is a timorous animal, and in his fright will give up or acknowledge any thing. The truth is, that even to the moſt rational courage, and the beſt informed underſtanding, the notion of irreſiſtible power muſt be terrible, and without ſome alleviation, would be inconſiſtent with every idea of happineſs.

CHAP. IV.

Of the Wiſdom of God.

WE ſhall now conſider the moſt natural and obvious method which the mind can probably take to eaſe itſelf of thoſe dreadful apprehenſions in the moſt effectual manner, which the diſcovery of an infinite power, acting only with ſuch materials as are to be found in the univerſe (to ſay nothing

nothing of the unlimited power of creating others) would neceſſarily occaſion to a creature ſo ſenſible of its ſituation as man is known to be: a creature who not only feels in the moment of danger, but who has the impreſſion of the paſt, and the dread of the future, ſtrongly imprinted on his mind: whoſe hopes and fears keep his mind in ſuch a conſtant agitation, as can only be rendered tolerable, either by ſinking into a ſtupid inſenſibility, or by rational meditation upon his ſituation and circumſtances.

Now it ſeems natural to imagine, that thoſe men whoſe faculties were ſufficiently acute to perceive the full effort of that power which is diſcoverable in the viſible operations of the univerſe, would exert their ingenuity, and apply their obſervation, to find out in what manner this power produced its effects; whether at random, or according to any regular method, from which ſomething like fixed rules might be formed.

If they found any reaſon to ſuſpect that there was no harmony among the things of the material world, we may eaſily conceive the ſtate of their minds, by recollecting our own condition and feelings when in ſituations where we are liable to accidents from things that we apprehend to be acting at random. For if the terror which a ſingle inſtance produces be ſo unſupportable; how dreadful muſt it be if we were ſo ſituated with regard to every thing.

And yet, could it only once be perceived, that this power acts according to fixed rules, whatever thoſe rules might be; and although in many ſituations we were more certain of our deſtruction than if we knew no ſuch rules; if we could only be pretty confident of our ſafety in ſome others,

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the very conſideration, that things are governed by fixed laws, will afford a ſatisfaction to the mind which cannot be had from more favourable, but more uncertain circumſtances. And this makes many people wiſh to be expoſed to the blows of blind fate, who, they think, can only ſtrike according to the laws of matter and motion, than to put themſelves, with reſignation, under the direction of a powerful, intelligent being, who may reaſonably puniſh them for their offences.

Farther, if it ſhould appear that things are not only fixed to a certain degree, but that the laws by which the appearances of the univerſe are regulated, are in a kind of active ſtate, extending their tendency beyond the immediate effects produced; that is, that ſuch a thing is done for the ſake of ſomething to be done afterwards, or in conſequence of ſomething that has been done before, ſo as to furniſh us with the notion of contrivance, this immediately leads us to an intelligent cauſe or cauſes: and a farther examination into the manner according to which theſe means are made to bring about their ends, will ſuggeſt different degrees of wiſdom, according as the means ſeem to be more or leſs fitted for anſwering their particular ends.

Now, if this wiſdom ſhould appear to be infinite, we have then got a rational and proper balance for an infinite power; and muſt conclude that the whole of this power will be put into action, and made to produce the beſt effects poſſible; and that we have nothing to fear from blind fate, or the ungovernable nature of things, becauſe theſe can do nothing againſt infinite power directed by infinite wiſdom.

It is true, it is impoſſible for us to reach to a knowledge of infinite wiſdom, though we have ſufficient inſtances before our eyes of aſtoniſhing degrees of power and wiſdom, diſplayed in the general ſtructure of the world, the regular motions of the heavenly bodies; and the means made uſe of to preſerve the brittle and complicated parts of animal bodies, together with their formation, furniſh aſtoniſhing inſtances of wiſdom to the attentive and rational obſerver: and the connection and dependence which the things have upon each other, exhibit demonſtrative marks of a plan. This view of the univerſe would certainly lead our minds up to God, were we not ſo ſtrongly connected with this world from our earlieſt infancy.

For, firſt, we are connected with the inanimate parts of the creation by our bodies, which, in many reſpects, are ſubject to the ſame laws that the groſſeſt parts of matter obey; a human body, and a log of wood, fall from the top of a precipice exactly in the ſame manner; and many ſuch laws as this we are very well acquainted with, before we are capable of any very deep reflection. Self-preſervation, the idea of which is ſo ſtrongly implanted in our nature, will not ſuffer us to delay the acquiring a knowledge of the moſt obvious and neceſſary properties of matter, until we can be certain that this knowledge is derived from proper principles. And, ſecondly, we are connected with the material world by our paſſions, the moſt turbulent and craving of which have their gratification in the enjoyment of earthly things; and the ravenous nature of ſome paſſions prevents any nice diſcernment in the choice of ſuch gratifications.

On the other hand, we are connected with heaven immediately only by our reaſon, and but remotely by our paſſions; and after habits acquired by an uniform experience have given us a conviction, or rather a confidence (for there is no argument in the caſe) of the ſtability of the laws of nature, even before the uſe of reaſon; and when the experimental gratification of the paſſions by ſenſible things, have led us to conſider ſpiritual gratifications as unſubſtantial, or perhaps viſionary, reaſon has too hard a taſk, when ſet to combat ſuch habits and prejudices. A man who has ſuch ſtrong conviction of the ſtability and certainty of the things of this preſent world, cannot readily fall in with the thoughts of a new heaven and a new earth. And nothing but a clear and poſitive revelation can conquer ſuch natural prejudices, by exhibiting greater rewards and puniſhments as a conſequence of our behaviour in what concerns the other world. And as remote and diſtant proſpects affect us but little, how admirably are theſe promiſes and threatenings brought forward by the uncertainty of death; for to the man of underſtanding they are always preſent, as every moment may be his laſt.

If any one ſhould think that it might have been better not to have the material world governed by ſuch fixed laws, and that a ſucceſſion of new things would have exhibited more wiſdom and power than to bring back the ſame things in a conſtant rotation. Probably there are beings to whoſe faculties ſuch a ſcene might be ſuited, but we enjoy great advantages by having the inanimate parts of the creation ſubject to very fixed laws. For even the dead and inactive parts of matter, from the very circumſtance of their being dead

dead and inactive, diſcover wonderful contrivance, when it is conſidered how by this means they are fitted for the convenience of animals, and eſpecially of man.

It requires time and attention to get acquainted with the nature and diſpoſition of animals; nor, when once diſcovered, is it always the ſame; for they are ſometimes miſchievous, and ſometimes harmleſs: or if the nature of all animals was as difficult to know as that of man, this world would be uninhabitable or intolerable.

What a condition ſhould we be in, if we were doubtful, after a thouſand experiments, whether we might thruſt our hand into the fire or the water with moſt ſafety, upon a well-grounded apprehenſion, that they might have changed their nature ſince our laſt experience of their qualities.

But all our knowledge that is properly our own acquiſition, is founded in habits which it is impoſſible to form, but by preſenting the ſame things again and again to our obſervation. And when we conſider what a wonderful harmony, what a beautiful and magnificent ſcene this univerſe preſents to us, and how nicely all its parts are balanced by the ſingle law of gravitation, a deſign ſufficiently extenſive preſents itſelf to our view, though the ſame appearances are repeatedly exhibited to us, yet not oftener than is neceſſary for the inſtruction of ſuch a frail and tranſitory creature as man. And the farther conſideration, that the law of this gravitation regulates the motion of the planets, and alſo of the comets, which make ſo large a circuit, and paſs over a kind of immenſity of ſpace, furniſhes a beautiful argument to our purpoſe; the operations being carried on upon a ſcale ſufficiently large to enable us, upon ſeeing the

the motions of the bodies that come within our obſervation, ſo nicely adjuſted, and the harmony, order, and dependence of the parts of ſo large a ſyſtem preſerved, to aſſent with reaſon as well as faith to thoſe ſublime expreſſions of *Scripture*, in which thoſe attributes of power and wiſdom are revealed; ſuch appearances being a *ſenſible*, intelligible, beautiful, and pertinent commentary upon Revelation.

And thus the power of God, though infinite, acting upon matter according to fixed laws, and ſuch as diſcover infinite wiſdom and contrivance, loſes, by that circumſtance alone, much of the terror which it would otherwiſe occaſion to ſuch a creature as man.

CHAP. V.

Of the Goodneſs of God.

THE ſentiments, which naturally ariſe in our minds, upon conſidering the power of the Supreme Being as infinite, even when moderated, and all the terrors of them as it were ſubdued by the reflection, that this power is directed by wiſdom equally uncontrouled and unlimited, would nevertheleſs be mixed with much of dread, before a conviction that we ourſelves are ſo particularly the objects of God's regard, that we may believe upon good grounds, that both his power and his wiſdom will be finally directed to procure us the moſt ſolid and laſting advantages.

But if we are not only in the hands of a powerful, but likewiſe of a wiſe and good *Being*, who enjoys theſe perfections, not as confined by the circum-

circumſtances of time, place, or opportunity, but in an unlimited degree, we may reſt well aſſured, that he will make every thing, even the moſt unfavourable circumſtances, turn to the advantage of his ſenſible and rational creatures.

The power and wiſdom of God could have been ſufficiently diſplayed in this world, by the contrivance and arrangement and creation of mere inanimate matter; but it would have been impoſſible, from the moſt exquiſite contrivance of this kind, to have ever arrived at any notion of goodneſs. Yet when we find ſo much of the creation conſiſting of ſenſible creatures, capable of pleaſure and pain, happineſs and miſery; by obſerving the proviſion that is made for gratifying the deſires of ſuch creatures, and by conſidering the nature and nnmber of thoſe deſires, we may, in ſome meaſure, pronounce the principle or *Being* to which they owe their exiſtence to be either perfect or imperfect; and the motives of the Maker of ſuch a world to be either good or evil; though ſuch concluſions ought always to be drawn, with a ſtrong impreſſion upon our minds of our own ſhortſightedneſs, and how little we are qualified to judge of infinite perfections.

However, we cannot err according to my plan, which recommends ſuch ſpeculations only as a commentary upon the Scriptures, and propoſes a view of natural appearances, and our own ſituation in this world, as the moſt effectual, and even the only method for bringing down to our capacities any conception of that character of himſelf which God has been pleaſed to reveal. And this ought to be conſidered as an inſtance of his goodneſs, that he does not oblige us to live entirely by faith; or if that could not well be conſiſtent with our nature

nature and faculties, yet it is wonderful condeſcenſion to have ſet his character before us in ſuch a clear light, making it the immediate object of our ſenſes in ſuch numberleſs inſtances, when he might have put us upon the neceſſity of taking his own word for it. And nothing can be a greater proof of our happineſs in this reſpect, than that it is conſidered as an inſtance of ſuch ingenuity to find out matter of diſcontent, that any ſeeming diſcovery to that purpoſe, is ſure to place the man who makes it in the rank of philoſophers, as having the penetration to ſpy out a blemiſh, which, ſo far from hurting, had never been perceived by mankind. Nay this world, which is only intended for a temporary lodging, is found by moſt men ſo convenient and comfortable, that they are well diſpoſed to make it their everlaſting habitation.

Nor is this to be wondered at, when we conſider the nature of man, and the ample diſplay of his goodneſs which God has been pleaſed to make in the world. For if we examine that part of the *Creation*, which is ſubject to our obſervation, we ſhall find it filled with an infinite variety of living creatures, every one of them amply provided for, and all of them diſcovering ſigns of enjoyment. Their bodies, by the formation of them, diſcovering marks of infinite power and wiſdom or contrivance, by being wonderfully adapted to their circumſtances, and ſo formed as moſt effectually to preſerve the life of the animal, by ſecuring it againſt thoſe dangers to which, by its way of life, it is moſt expoſed.

Add to this, the wonderful proviſion for preſerving the *ſpecies* of each different rank of animals in a ſtated proportion: the prolific nature of

which are moſt uſeful, and liable to the greateſt hazards, and the care taken, as it were, to curb the propagation of the moſt ravenous and deſtructive kinds. If lions and tygers were to breed like rabbits, the whole earth muſt ſoon become a deſert. The fiercer ſort of animals are a check upon one another, and upon the other animals, otherwiſe the beaſts would have been in poſſeſſion of the earth; a very uſeleſs prerogative to them, though it would have been attended with the deſtruction of the human race. But according to the good and providential care of God, the different parts of this world were kept in ſuch a ſtate as to be fit for the cultivation of man, as he came to take poſſeſſion of them.

Late diſcoveries have given us ſuch an inſight into the animal œconomy and the conſtitution of the world, that he muſt be a novice in reaſoning who ſhould pretend to ſay, that our ignorance of the uſe of any ſpecies of animals would even be a ſufficient ground of ſuſpicion that it is not created to anſwer the wiſeſt and beſt purpoſes; becauſe we find, that the farther we extend our inquiries, we are able not only to diſcover admirable contrivance, even where we leaſt expected it, but are likewiſe frequently taught to correct our preſumption for ſuſpecting a want of utility in many things which have an unfavourable appearance at firſt ſight.

The wonderful contrivances for preſerving the lives of animals; their different ſenſes for giving a variety to their gratifications, the great pleaſure they all take in exiſtence, as appears by the high value they all ſet upon life and its enjoyments, to which nothing can make them indifferent, are full proofs that the author of their nature is a good

Being.

Being. And with regard to man, I would add, that the little attention which he pays to this very ſubject, is a proof of his happineſs, as it ſhews how much he is at his eaſe, when he has no occaſion to draw conſolation to himſelf from ſuch ſpeculations as theſe.

Nor have we any reaſon to think that the happineſs of animals is in the leaſt diminiſhed by the mutual aid which they lend each other: and even perhaps the very circumſtance of their preying upon each other, though ſo very unfavourable at firſt appearance, increaſes their happineſs: becauſe the apprehenſions they are in from a dread of danger, put them upon exertions, which may make their condition very different from a ſtate of miſery, perhaps the very reverſe: as we often find from our own experience, that a ſtate of action and danger is attended with many agreeable ſenſations; and that a ſtate of indolence and repoſe, though ſo pleaſing in proſpect, and ſo generally coveted by all mankind, has often no ſmall ſhare of miſery annexed to it, and never fails to be attended with wearineſs and almoſt an indifference about life. Nay, even the very painful ſenſations may be regarded as adding to the pleaſure of the animal, or at leaſt as neceſſary for the preſervation of it in health and ſpirits. And this œconomy ſeems unavoidable, unleſs the animal were to be acted upon as a mere machine, without any principle of action within itſelf. Painful ſenſations therefore ought to be looked upon as the ſprings and principles of action in animals, rather than as any real evil in themſelves. But with regard to man they have a ſtill higher uſe, being the chief inſtruments by which we are taught mo-

rality, and brought to a proper ſenſe of our condition.

Nor is it any objection againſt the goodneſs of God, that he has fixed a period to the life of animals: becauſe it ſeems evident from the ſtructure of their bodies, that their enjoyments in a great meaſure end before the natural period of their lives, if they meet with no accident. Succeſſive generations of animals therefore ſeem more likely to multiply and augment happineſs, than a continuation of the ſame race of animals. Beſides the care taken to propagate and keep the different kinds of animals diſtinct, and to preſerve any particular ſpecies from being loſt, preſents us with one of the moſt ſurpriſing inſtances of the wiſdom and goodneſs of God which it is poſſible to conceive; for many comforts and enjoyments depend upon this part of the divine œconomy: ſuch as the pleaſure and anxiety diſcoverable in the parents of the different kinds for the preſervation of their offſpring, and the comfortable care and ſupport which the young derive from thoſe inſtincts.

But moreover, all the animal ſenſations, we may be certain, from our own experience, are inſtruments of convenience, or pleaſure, or of both; and become inſtruments of pain only by accident, or for the wiſeſt purpoſes, as tending to the preſervation of the animal. Thus the ſenſation of hunger, which is intolerably painful to all animals, is at the ſame time one of the moſt general ſources of pleaſure. And what is ſtill more extraordinary, even the imperfect ſenſes of ſome animals, as the ſenſe of ſeeing in moles, is a proof of goodneſs and contrivance, this ſenſe being better fitted, from the very circumſtance of its imperfection, for their way of life.

But

But the man who would impreſs upon his mind a ſtrong ſenſe of the goodneſs of God, ought to enlarge his views, and take in, as far as we can, the whole viſible creation, and conſider how much the happineſs of animals depends upon each other, and upon the inanimate parts of the creation, as this will furniſh a boundleſs diſplay of the goodneſs of the author of nature. For inſtance, what a dreadful deſert would this earth be, if not enlightened and cheriſhed by the rays of the Sun? What comfort do all animals enjoy by the agreeable returns of day and night, marking out the times for action, and the times for repoſe? The various ſeaſons of the year, contrived for producing a ſucceſſion of the things neceſſary for life and animal enjoyments, to ſay nothing of the mental pleaſure which this variety gives; the numberleſs things with which this earth is ſtored for the pleaſure and comfort and convenience of animals, ſuch as vegetables, air, and water, and the means uſed to keep up a conſtant and regular ſupply of theſe freſh and fit for uſe; all theſe, and many other things too obvious to need to be mentioned, furniſh us with the fulleſt proof, that God "openeth "his hand liberally, and ſupplieth the wants of "all his creatures."

In ſhort, ſo univerſal and extenſive is his goodneſs, that almoſt from our own experience we may affirm, that there is no part of this earth, either land or water, but what may be conſidered in ſome way or other as contributing to the happineſs of the animal creation. And the benefits which all animals, and even vegetable productions, and perhaps minerals, derive from the light and heat of the Sun, are a convincing proof how much very diſtant objects promote the happineſs of

animals, and influence the things of this world: and thus a very extenſive plan becomes the immediate object of our ſenſes. For a *Being* with power and knowledge ſufficient to make this earth, and every thing in it, would have done but half his work, and muſt have left a wonderful but lamentable proof of his power and weakneſs, wiſdom and folly.

Powerful and convincing as theſe arguments are, yet the power, wiſdom, and goodneſs of God are ſtill more viſible, or rather more clearly to be underſtood by real, poſitive, and pertinent inſtances in his creation of rational creatures, who are a kind of image of himſelf, and partake, in ſome meaſure, of ſeveral of his attributes; eſpecially when we compare our faculties with the means provided for their improvement. For inſtance, how admirably is every thing contrived in the univerſe for gratifying the faculties of man, and alſo for improving them; and on the other hand, how well are the faculties of man fitted for receiving ſuch gratification? beſides the preſent enjoyment, we can anticipate the future, and recollect the paſt, with great pleaſure. What various kinds of pleaſure is communicated to the mind, by the eye of a rational creature, when every thing is illuminated by the glorious light of the Sun! What ſublime entertainment is afforded us by a proper exertion of our rational faculties, when employed upon the different objects to which we have acceſs by our ſenſes, even after we have withdrawn ourſelves from the ſcene of action, retiring, as it were, from a material to a ſpiritual world! And here we exerciſe our thoughts, not upon the *individual* things, like the beaſts, but in comparing new objects with thoſe already known, obſerving

obſerving their relations, diſcerning what they have in common, and marking in what circumſtances they differ. And to ſhew, that this uſe of our faculties is pleaſing to God; he has made wiſe and ample proviſion for ſuch an exerciſe of our reaſon. For if things had been more uniform, what a fund of amuſement and rational enquiry, and means of improving our faculties, would have been loſt: and if things had been more diverſified, by their too great variety they would have been quite unmanageable by the human mind; as they would have produced nothing but that kind of diſtraction, which prevents us from fixing our attention upon any thing. Either extreme would have produced a ſtate of idiotiſm, but this *golden mean*, which is preſerved in the preſent ſyſtem, is fitted for bringing our rational faculties to the higheſt perfection. Even the apparent evils in the phyſical world are contrived for furniſhing us with means for the proper exerciſe of our faculties. How many of our nobleſt diſcoveries would have never been attempted, had not the neceſſity of our ſituation put men upon an extraordinary exertion of their abilities? And thus the very phyſical evils of life, are a proof of the power, of the wiſdom and goodneſs of God, as having no inconſiderable ſhare in the improvement of human nature.

CHAP. VI.

Of Sin.

THUS far we have the greateſt reaſon to be ſatisfied with the world, as perfectly conſiſtent with that character of himſelf which God has been pleaſed to reveal; and worthy of being conſidered as the workmanſhip of an infinitely powerful, wiſe, and good Being: and the order and connexion which is kept up in the univerſe, ſhew that every thing is under the providential care of God; eſpecially as phyſical evil is ſo eaſily to be accounted for, that it may be ſafely produced as a proof of the wiſdom and goodneſs of the Deity.

But though we can reconcile all other natural appearances with the attributes of God, yet we cannot reconcile our own conduct and behaviour *to them:* nor do we think our actions and motives of conduct fit to be truſted with our corrupted brethren, without diſguiſe; nor, when we examine ourſelves, can we ſatisfy our own partial conſciences. Reduced to ſuch a ſituation as ſelf-condemnation, the thoughts of our being in the preſence of a God who knows our moſt ſecret devices, and who cannot behold iniquity without a deteſtation of the guilty perſon, muſt be peculiarly diſtreſſing, and, upon ſome occaſions, intolerable; for in committing ſin, we carefully ſhun the ſight of our fellow-creatures, and, ſo far as we can, try to blind our own conſcience.

We are naturally in a ſtate of ignorance concerning the cauſe of this unaccountable part of our character, namely, that we ſhould have "a

"law

" law in our members warring againſt the law of " our minds, and leading us captive to ſin and " death." And we, who are informed of the true cauſe, and alſo of the remedy, are well aſſured that this diſorder in human nature could never be cured by ſuch efforts as men make for the improvement of their faculties, and that ſuch an undertaking was conſidered as deſperate, even in the opinion of angels.

However, our natural ſentiments are ſufficiently ſtrong to impreſs us with a dread of certain puniſhment for our evil actions, evil in the worſt ſenſe, as being judged and determined to be ſo before the partial tribunal of our own minds. And as this world exhibits conſtant inſtances of proſperous villainy, the natural notions of mankind carried them to a future ſtate, where every one was to meet with that treatment which his actions deſerved.

Other evils are alleviated, and ſometimes entirely removed, by the aſſociated abilities of mankind; but we can have no hopes of a reformation from ſin by any ſuch means; for the more men aſſociate together, the more vicious they become. When they have once made the diſcovery, that they ſtand in need of mutual allowances, it is natural to ſuppoſe that a party will ſoon be formed ſufficient to keep each other in countenance. And when their natural reaſon failed them, their ſuperſtition would be found a very fit inſtrument for compleating their corruption. The heathens, in their proſperity, are loud in their praiſes of the goodneſs of the gods, and by making *them* partakers of their vices and enjoyments, they thought themſelves ſure of eſcaping with impunity; and even the natural notion of a future ſtate, being

left

left to be new modelled, according to the imaginations of men, became an object of terror to very few; and when the ideas that ſuggeſted the perſuaſion of the exiſtence of ſuch a ſtate were overpowered by vicious habits, a total diſbelief of ſuch a ſtate would become very common.

The preſent world is a permanent thing, created perfect, and, as it were, in full maturity; not left like a plant or animal to grow up from a diminutive to a more perfect ſtate: every day exhibiting the ſame appearances as another, or what little variety is diſcoverable in the material world, ſeems to be no more than is neceſſary for keeping up the attention of mankind. Now it would be forming a very unworthy notion of the Supreme Being, to imagine that he could not reform and correct human nature, without a conſtant violation of the fixed laws of the material world; for inſtance, that a ſtone was not to follow the law of gravitation, but tumble down whenever a wicked man came in the way; or that money ſhould loſe its nature and uſe as ſoon as it came into the poſſeſſion of the thief. This would not be to reform, but to deſtroy. Inſtead of rooting out the evil diſpoſition from the mind, this would only remove every temptation out of the way. But the trial of true virtue is only in a ſtate where temptations are to be found. And thus the proſperity of the wicked in this world, that great ſtumbling-block to Jew and Gentile, is perfectly conſiſtent with the attributes of God, and the plan of the material world; and conſequently nothing which this world preſents to us can cure human nature of its imperfections. Proper notions of the attributes of God, would undoubtedly free the mind from a great deal of folly and idle ſuperſtition, and would certainly prepare

prepare our minds for receiving, and even expecting farther inſtruction; but neither theſe notions, nor a future ſtate *in idea*, could do any thing towards a reformation of human nature: ſo that another world *in reality*, and a farther interpoſition of the Supreme Being, are abſolutely neceſſary for accompliſhing this great work. But before I attempt an explanation of the ſcheme of revelation, it will be proper to remove ſome prejudices of education; for we are educated, in general, upon a tacit ſuppoſition that this world is every thing.

THE END OF THE SECOND BOOK.

BOOK

BOOK III.

Containing an Inquiry into the Origin and Extent of learned Prejudice; and an Examination of the Atheiſtical Syſtems which this Kind of Prejudice ſeems calculated to ſupport.

CHAP. I.

The Idea of this Book.

THE reader has, no doubt, obſerved already, that the ſame force is not here allowed to ſome methods of argumentation, which the world in general appears diſpoſed to allow them; and particularly it may ſeem a little ſingular, that I have affected nothing of demonſtration. And as, in the examination of the evidence of the Chriſtian Religion, I ſhall be obliged to deviate ſtill farther from the received modes of reaſoning, and lay the ſtreſs of my argument upon very different principles from thoſe upon which the ſeveral ſciences are eſtabliſhed, it will be neceſſary to explain the reaſon of this innovation.

Now, as a few words would not be ſufficient for this purpoſe, it is my intention to point out the origin, limits, uſe and abuſe of ſuch arguments as may be properly termed ſcientifical; and from hence endeavour to ſhew, that it is really a prejudice,

a prejudice, which may be called a learned prejudice, to apply ſuch reaſonings, unleſs to certain things, and in certain circumſtances.

My plan is not to deſtroy, nor even to weaken, the force of any method of argumentation which mankind have invented for their uſe or improvement, but only to confine artificial reaſoning to its proper channel, and prevent thoſe unnatural overflowings of it, which may prove pernicious to Religion; and which will certainly hinder reaſon itſelf from producing the beneficial effects, which it is naturally calculated to produce, by converting into an inſtrument of vanity, ſophiſtry, and deſtruction, thoſe faculties which were beſtowed on mankind for their mutual aſſiſtance, comfort, and improvement.

The whole courſe of our lives, from the cradle to the grave, leads us through various prejudices: and the very means made uſe of to remove antient prejudices, generally create new ones. Not that this life is to be conſidered as a deluſion, or a dream; it is a reality, and often a ſad reality. The miſtake conſiſts in this; that we expect more fruit, and a greater variety in kind, from our improvements, than the nature of things can allow them to produce. "Do men gather grapes of "thorns, or figs of thiſtles?" Can the little partial and contracted ſyſtems of human wiſdom, regulate the extenſive plan of the redemption of mankind?

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

Of the Habits of Thinking acquired by grammatical Study and claſſical Reading.

EDUCATION gives an acknowledged ſuperiority: but this advantage does not ariſe ſo much from a more extenſive acquaintance with things, as from a more accurate arrangement of them, by which we have the uſe and command of our knowledge, and a power of communicating it to others; and eſpecially whoever has had the advantage of a regular education, is in poſſeſſion of the ready faculty of enlarging his knowledge by the habits of attention which he has formed.

The very giving names to things, if it be done with any tolerable diſtinctneſs and propriety, is a conſiderable acquiſition of knowledge. But this knowledge being neceſſary and common to all mankind, in a certain degree, would not be the firſt thing to diſtinguiſh and divide the world into the two claſſes of learned and unlearned: ſomething more artificial was neceſſary for this purpoſe, and the invention of letters furniſhed ſufficient ſcope for the ingenious to diſtinguiſh themſelves.

Things that are natural, however uſeful or ingenious, would never draw the attention, nor gain the admiration of uncultivated minds; but to be able, by a few ſtrokes, to communicate one's own thoughts, or to diſcover the thoughts of another, by the inſpection of ſuch *characters*, has ſomething of that kind of wonderful in it which has a powerful effect on the human mind;

and the man poſſeſſed of ſuch a ſecret could not fail to draw a number of admirers after him.

The reſpect paid to this art, added to its extenſive uſe and application, made mankind exhauſt their invention and abilities in bringing it to perfection. Particularly the Greeks brought their language to ſuch a degree of perfection, and exhauſted ſo much reaſoning and ingenuity in the formation of it, that the human mind, in the preſent ſtate of affairs and opinions, hardly requires any farther cultivation, than what an accurate, grammatical knowledge of this language will give.

For we ought not ſo much to be put upon ſtoring our minds with facts, which are daily forcing themſelves upon us, as in acquiring early habits of arranging and claſſing them. The artificial man of ſociety, is neither the divine, mathematician, or artiſt, but the grammarian. Every man has thoughts, but what he finds himſelf deficient in, is a ready and accurate method of arranging them, and communicating them to others. And for this purpoſe, our plan of education is remarkably judicious; becauſe ſuch habits may be very compleatly acquired, by attending to the grammatical arrangement of words in the Greek and Latin languages, the moſt perfect, general, and unexceptionable, perhaps, in the whole *circle* of the ſciences, if we except the properties of extenſion and number.

All language is reduced to eight parts of ſpeech, and new diviſions of theſe ariſe from the different uſe and inflection of the ſeveral parts: and after this buſineſs is finiſhed, the claſſing of the words to make a ſenſe or ſentence, gives new ſcope to the ingenuity of the grammarian, and furniſhes

furniſhes new exerciſe for the genius of the ſcholar; and laſtly, the diviſion of compoſition into proſe and verſe, affords freſh exerciſe for this arranging faculty. And thus it comes to paſs, that the habits formed during a regular courſe of education, ſpent upon the grammatical arrangement of a very complicated language, are ſtronger and more extenſive than can be well imagined. And the firſt effects of it is, that we can reliſh nothing but what appears in ſome ſuch regular form. So natural, after a time, does this appear to us, that we are apt to conſider the habits thus acquired to be but powers that the mind was always in poſſeſſion of, though indeed they are in the higheſt degree artificial; and this any one may convince himſelf to be the truth, by trying to form ſuch habits in a mind come to maturity.

A boy, who has been properly educated, leaves ſchool with his mind ſtored with the principles of all knowledge, yet loaded with prejudice, which experience, reflection, and an extenſive intercourſe with the world, muſt correct, enlarge, and draw out into uſe. That his knowledge, even at that early period, is very extenſive, muſt be allowed by every one who conſiders that he has been taught to form a very compleat ſyſtem of philoſophy, according to the moſt regular form. The rules of grammar are ſo many principles to which a boy is required to reduce the whole ſyſtem of a language; for this purpoſe, he ſearches authors as a philoſopher examines the appearances of nature, in confirmation of his principles; he arranges the words as they occur under his different principles, and forms in fact, or at leaſt is taught to form, a body of ſcience. And it is worth obſerving, that this mighty fabric is raiſed chiefly

and directly by the aſſiſtance of the memory, a perfect faculty in our earlieſt infancy: whereas it is juſt the contrary in geometry, where the judgement is kept upon the ſtretch, and the memory has only a ſecond part to act. But when the judgement is come to maturity, it is only ſuppoſing his grammar loſt, and the ſcholar perceives in himſelf a power, and the means of forming a new one for that or any other language, and underſtands perfectly how the firſt grammar might have been formed. And it is now that he feels himſelf to be a philoſopher. And this, though it is not generally attended to, is what gives the advantage to a man whoſe mind has been prepared and cultivated by a regular education. It is not the acquiring the language in any manner, that would produce this effect; for I am well perſuaded, that a man might ſpeak both Greek and Latin like a living language, and by long habit, with propriety, yet with very little improvement to his underſtanding.

It is next to be obſerved, that as language is the work of man, in a certain ſenſe, the arrangement or claſſing of words, is a ſubject perfectly ſuited to his capacity, and may acquire from his hands all the perfection of which ſuch a ſyſtem is capable. The eſſentials of it, indeed, ſuch as that there are eight parts of ſpeech, and other things of the ſame kind, ſeem to be derived from the nature of things, or at leaſt from the circumſtances of men; but as to every thing elſe, faſhion and reputation might change them at pleaſure; ſo that the making a perfect language, is at leaſt a thing conceivable as within the power of man: and this will neceſſarily make our grammatical arrangements much more regular and con-

ſiſtent than our other performances, when we attempt to methodize and reduce to ſyſtem ſubjects of which we have leſs command: ſo that a deficiency, in this reſpect, is not to be aſcribed to the ſubject's being deficient either in truth or importance, nor does it prove any thing elſe, but only that the matter of it is not ſo much in the power of man.

The Greeks were an extraordinary people in many reſpects, but in none more than in their manner of writing and thinking; nor does it appear to me, from any thing I have ever ſeen, that any other nation had an idea of philoſophical arrangement. A ſyſtem of geometry, not borrowed from them, I ſhould conſider as the greateſt curioſity. All the civilized part of mankind have been content to be their imitators in the ſyſtem-making buſineſs; the Romans firſt, and after them other nations. And thus the reading of the *claſſicks* forms us to a certain manner of thinking, and makes us often fix our opinions upon ſubjects before we have opportunity or abilities to examine the principles upon which they are founded. They come to us in the ſhape in which we have been taught to believe that truth appears; and if this be preſerved, we are not very ſolicitous to examine whether they be ſhadows or ſubſtance. At the ſame time our taſte is formed; and without a certain order of arrangement, and a certain manner of expreſſion, we are diſguſted with a compoſition; and, according to the nature of the ſubject, are diſpoſed to treat it with contempt or ridicule. And thus the ſtyle, ſubject, and arrangement of the Scriptures come to be examined with no ſmall prejudice; being ſo very different from

thoſe

thoſe models upon which a man of any learning has formed his thoughts and taſte.

Nobody can think that I mean to advance, that the Greeks were the only nation who reaſoned or drew conſequences. What I ſay, is this; that I could never find any reaſon to think that the other nations ever reaſoned ſyſtematically, by forming definitions, and deriving their conſequences, not immediately from facts, but from ſcientific principles. But this the Greeks always did, upon every ſubject that would admit of ſuch reaſoning, ſetting ſuch concluſions at leaſt upon an equal footing with matter of fact, and often adopting them in direct oppoſition to facts.

Things occur naturally to the minds of all men, in much the ſame form and order, and always encumbered with more circumſtances than the particular occaſion requires, and of ſuch circumſtances the moſt trifling will be crowding foremoſt. The ſeparating the neceſſary from the unneceſſary circumſtances, frees the mind from much obſcurity, and gives a ſimplicity to the ſubject, by removing ſuch things out of the way as tend only to perplex and bewilder the underſtandſtanding. And where the ſubject admits of a regular ſyſtematic form, the mind is made wonderfully ſenſible of its powers, by the ready management which it thus acquires, of very complicated ſubjects. Yet the object of ſuch ſyſtems is not truth, but conſiſtency, and the end anſwered by them, is not to change the nature of things, but only to enable the mind to comprehend a greater variety of natural knowledge: and the inſtruments made uſe of for this purpoſe, form a kind of artificial knowledge, which very effectually diſtinguiſhes the learned from the illiterate; for

when they cannot diſtinguiſh themſelves by real knowledge, the learned can always ſilence the vulgar, or raiſe their admiration, by talking a different language.

But after ſo much pains, which had procured ſuch a creditable diſtinction among mankind, the man of learning will not be eaſily brought to think that, by all this tedious *apparatus*, he was not got nearer the truth, or the real cauſes of things, than the vulgar, but had been only learning to arrange the different kinds of knowledge which experience, or obſervation, or reflexion might throw in his way, and to give his own thoughts a conſiſtent form, and bring them before the world with more decency, gravity, and propriety, than they ramble about in his own head. But inſtead of being ſatisfied with ſuch diſtinctions and advantages, the man of learning would be diſpoſed to conſider himſelf as capable of deciding upon every queſtion which might be propoſed; at leaſt to think that every compoſition is nonſenſe, which is not formed upon his rules: and at this pitch of conceit the man is very apt to reſt, who finiſhes his ſtudies with his grammatical education.

In conſequence of what is here ſaid, if any one ſhould aſk me, whether I diſapprove of this plan of education? I anſwer; by no means, for although it neceſſarily produces ſuch prejudices, it is certainly the beſt that could be imagined; becauſe it is better to have prejudices upon ſome ſubjects, than to be ignorant upon every ſubject; for ignorance implies in it every kind of prejudice. To be able to think accurately upon any ſubject, even if our opinions ſhould have no better foundation than a conſiſtency with ſome imaginary

ginary principles, is a conſiderable point gained, and is even a ſtep towards a proper examination of the truth of facts, though our opinions lead us to contradict it. For the error does not conſiſt in having gone ſo far, but in not going farther. Becauſe a little experience would ſoon teach us, that things really exiſting are not ſo much in our power as our own fancies and imaginations; and therefore in arranging them we muſt proceed upon different principles, without being ſurprized if our work goes on but ſlowly, and at laſt ſtands ſtill, and entirely diſappoints our expectations. Several failures of this ſort, will bring us to a proper ſenſe of our ſituation and abilities, and convince us that we muſt turn to facts upon moſt occaſions, and lay theory aſide; and inſtead of pretending to be operators in the univerſe, to ſit down contented with the character of rational ſpectators.

I ſhall finiſh this chapter with taking notice of the groſs miſtake of thoſe who declaim againſt this method of education, which they ſay occaſions the loſs of ſo much time ſpent in learning grammars and mere words, when it is ſuppoſed the mind might be better employed upon things. It has certainly been found by experience, that thoſe have ſucceeded very ill, who have ſubſtituted any thing elſe in place of this method. The cauſe of which failure will be obvious from what has been here ſaid; for inſtead of being employed upon words, in the ſenſe of theſe objectors, if what I have advanced be true, and if we are taught to the purpoſe, we are in reality taught to philoſophize and form ſyſtems, and (which in the eye of a philoſopher is no inconſiderable ſyſtem) we are taught directly to make a language.

Some writers, it is true, forgetting or miſtaking the means of their own improvement, have attended only to the laſt part of their education, or what was conducted by themſelves, and concluding that all their knowledge was derived from that, ſet down the other parts, which they could not recollect with pleaſure, as an uſeleſs drudgery, and of courſe to be ſhunned in the plan of education which they would form. We ſee books written, and very well written, by people who have adopted theſe opinions; but ſhew me a book written by a man educated according to ſuch opinions; for that would be the only thing to the purpoſe.

CHAP. III.

Of the Habits of Thinking acquired by the Study of Mathematics and Natural Philoſophy.

BODIES have ſituation, ſize, ſhape, force, and a great variety of qualities, relations, and properties, which are the immediate objects of our ſenſes; but yet our ſenſes are by no means qualified to give them an accurate inveſtigation, even in thoſe particulars which it is in our power to diſcover. Our ſenſes are liable to real and imaginary deceptions; a body at reſt may be miſtaken for a body in motion; the quality of heat may ſeem to one perſon to be the predominant quality in a body, when another perſon pronounces it to be cold; nay, the ſame perſon may pronounce the ſame water to be hot and cold, by putting both hands in it; and yet this fallacious ſenſation will lead to a true concluſion, namely, that the one hand

hand is hotter than the other. The natural meaſure of diſtance, ſize, and ſhape, is very inaccurate; and alſo of force and motion. Thus it comes to paſs, that although the ſenſes are the direct inſtruments for acquiring knowledge, eſpecially of the natural kind, yet the philoſophical examination of natural bodies requires an amazing *apparatus*, mechanical and intellectual. For this purpoſe, the ſciences of extenſion and number muſt be perfectly underſtood, and ſtill there will be great room for ingenuity in applying them as occaſion may require.

The great multiplicity of objects, with which we are every where ſurrounded, diſtract the attention, and their reſemblances and differences perplex, bewilder, and deceive the underſtanding. Thus a faculty of claſſing things as they reſembled each other, or differed from each other, would be one of the moſt uſeful for improving and advancing human nature, above its original infirm condition. Where the reſemblance was very great, the curious inquirer would have to look for ſome difference by which the things could be diſtinguiſhed from each other; and where the difference was very viſible, the philoſopher's ſearch and ingenuity would be employed in finding out reſemblances. Theſe differences and reſemblances are of various kinds; a reſemblance in ſhape, ſize, colour, and ſtructure of parts, with various other differences and reſemblances which are the immediate objects of our ſenſes, ſuch as are the foundation of the arrangements in natural hiſtory.

Or the ſubject of inquiry may be concerning a reſemblance or difference of effects and internal qualities, which become ſenſible only by experiment; that is, by the application of ſome third

thing, or elſe appear only in particular circumſtances; and theſe are the foundation of the arrangements in natural philoſophy.

But let us carry theſe ſpeculations and operations as far as we pleaſe, and dignify them with the name of diſcoveries, yet we can never properly become *operators* in the univerſe; for, after we have done our beſt, we ought to reſt contented with the humbler title of rational *ſpectators*. The proudeſt philoſopher will never arrive at the ſkill of making an herb or a tree, much leſs will he ever be able to make a grub or a worm: and if he knows more facts than another concerning their component parts, or manner of life and generation, he is only a more rational ſpectator, but cannot proceed a ſtep towards the formation of a plant or animal, nor advance any thing beyond experience.

Let us now ſuppoſe a ſtudent, after finiſhing his grammatical ſtudies, to enter upon theſe ſpeculations, he would ſoon find himſelf in a new world, and ought to be perſuaded, that if he reaſoned upon his former principles, and truſted entirely to the internal operations of his underſtanding, that his ſpeculations would be no better than dreams; and this is, in fact, the caſe with regard to all thoſe ſyſtems which have been formed independent of experiment; you ſee the ſchool-boy or grammarian every where, but no traces of the natural philoſopher.

Yet, being once convinced of the neceſſity of a change of ſentiments, by finding that the properties and qualities of bodies are not whatever we may be pleaſed to ſuppoſe them, but what they may prove to be in fact, or by experiment; the inſtruments of his former knowledge muſt be laid aſide;

aſide; and his habits of attention and obſervation only made uſe of. He would find it in vain to attempt to form a new world by his obſervations of the old; as he might form a new language from his ſkill in another. No aſſumed principles would lead him to the formation of things; but they muſt be taken to pieces if we would know how they are formed. Or to have any certainty for our aſſumed principles, we muſt have inſtruments for meaſuring the effects which bodies have upon one another, as far as theſe depend upon force, ſituation, figure, number of parts and quantity of matter. If theſe meaſures could be accurately expreſſed, the inſtruments would be ſo far perfect, and experience would then certainly determine whether the principles aſſumed were really in nature. Now, all our meaſurable knowledge muſt be brought to the teſt of immediate experiment, or examined by mathematics. The natural philoſopher, therefore, muſt firſt of all be a mathematician. A natural philoſopher, without mathematics, is a painter without eyes, and a ſtatuary without hands.

The ſtudy of mathematics, therefore, which is a neceſſary branch of education of itſelf, becomes ſo alſo from this ſecondary view, that it is the only rational inſtrument of philoſophical inquiry, when things and their powers or effects are to be exactly meaſured.

This ſcience of mathematics is apt to create ſome prejudices as to the nature of evidence, and the form of demonſtration; which will, however, be removed in applying the ſcience to any practical purpoſes. For, whoever proceeds to meaſure the ſurface of the earth, if he attempts to keep to the truth of demonſtration, his ſcience will be found

found to be to no purpoſe; becauſe this ſcience knows no lines, but ſuch as are drawn upon an even ſurface; and beſides, theſe lines are either ſtraight or uniformly and regularly crooked, according to ſome few determinate rules. But unluckily for the purpoſe of the man, who might be diſpoſed to apply the rigour of demonſtration to practice, the ſurface of the earth is no *plane*, nor is it regularly crooked, if we ſpeak of it with reſpect to the ſcience of geometry. Yet if we chuſe to be a little humbler in our proſpects and purſuits, and content ourſelves with conſidering the ſubject, not according to ſcientific accuracy, but only as far as the neceſſity or rational curioſity of mankind requires, we ſhall find, that with this limitation we may be ſaid to be able to meaſure the earth, and alſo the effects of many powers that operate in nature.

Beſides curioſity and the improvement of our underſtanding, our circumſtances in this world force us upon ſuch ſpeculations, as tend to make us acquainted with the nature of things, in the material world. We find ourſelves particularly connected with the bodies which ſurround us; and theſe are often unmanageable and dangerous; capable of being uſed as offenſive or defenſive weapons; and may be applied, in various ways, to miniſter to our convenience or neceſſity. This makes it very uſeful, or even neceſſary, to be pretty well acquainted with them and their natures, in as far as we may be either benefited or injured by them: and our own nature would be imperfect, if we were not capable of acquiring this degree of knowledge.

If we ſet out with a reſolution to diſcover how a tree or a ſtone is made, we ſhall certainly loſe our

our labour, but if we content ourſelves with obſerving the differences and reſemblances that have place among trees and ſtones, we ſhall be able to claſs them according to their different kinds, and thus, upon all occaſions, to diſtinguiſh one kind of tree or ſtone from another.

Now, although this kind of knowledge will not enable us to make a tree or an animal, yet it will help us to talk more diſtinctly and intelligibly about them, and to have them more ready at hand to anſwer our different purpoſes.

We ought to reſt very well ſatisfied, if thoſe things, which go by the ſame name, always exhibit the ſame qualities or effects; for the diſcovery of this is as far as human ingenuity is able to proceed in inveſtigating the nature of things, and this degree of knowledge comes up to the wants of mankind, though not to their wiſhes. A comfortable *dependence*, under the government of an infinitely powerful, wiſe, and good Being, ought to bound all our deſires; but we are ſo abſurd as to look for *independence* under the protection of the laws of matter and motion. "The fool hath ſaid in "his heart no God" *for him:* his corruptions are ſo great, that he cannot endure the thought of being always expoſed to the obſervation of a God of infinite perfections.

There are, indeed, ſome inſtances, where we get beyond our immediate experience. The operations of gravity are very extenſive, and very regular. One may certainly tell in what manner, and in what circumſtances, a ſtone will fall to the ground, and yet Newton was the firſt who thought of deriving, from ſuch a regular and obvious appearance, a rule for making the force of gravity

gravity a ſtandard meaſure for determining the motion of bodies.

This diſcovery has ſubjected natural appearances more to the power of man, than all other diſcoveries put together; that is, it has given man greater power over himſelf, by freeing the mind from a number of the moſt dangerous, and, at the ſame time, moſt ſilly prejudices. The timidity of mankind is aſtoniſhing; we are apt to dread an enemy in every natural appearance; and in proportion as natural appearances are ſhewn to be innocent or beneficial, we gain, as it were, a triumph over nature, and in reality over our own weakneſs.

Yet it muſt be owned, that ſuch diſcoveries as theſe may indirectly create a great many new prejudices: for by overturning ſome deeply-rooted ſuperſtitions, ſuch diſcoveries will beget, in the mind of the ſuperficial ſtudent, ſome notions which he may be diſpoſed to carry beyond all bounds, by concluding that all Religion is but ſuperſtition of one kind or another, whoſe foundations may be entirely ſhaken by freſh diſcoveries. And the very report of ſuch a thing will open a glorious proſpect of independence to ſuperficial thinkers, who can expect nothing leſs than to ſee the gates of heaven and hell ſhut for ever. At leaſt thoſe who are diſpoſed to conſider material agents as the only inſtruments of divine vengeance, conſider every diſcovery as a diſarming of God. It is true, this can only be the opinion of the ſuperficial, who are incapable of making a proper eſtimate, or taking a diſtinct proſpect of the real addition that is made to their knowledge by ſuch diſcoveries.

But

But even the ſober-minded will leave this ſtudy with ſome prejudices. Becauſe, as the claſſical ſcholar will be conſtantly examining the univerſe by the rules of his grammar, ſo the natural philoſopher will be trying to find out, or imagine, accurate meaſures for every thing. And a little miſconception of this proceeding, may eaſily lead thoſe, who truſt to report for their information, to take up an opinion, that the laws of nature are of themſelves *neceſſary* and ſufficient for governing the univerſe. But it is proper, for the ſake of ſuch reaſoners, to make a diſtinction between a law *of* nature, and a law *in* nature. And without this diſtinction, the firſt propoſition in Newton's *Principia* might be made to put on a very formidable appearance, by being ſo interpreted as if the things there demonſtrated and their conſequences muſt follow from all poſſible ſyſtems of things; and that any *being*, who was to become an *operator* in the univerſe, muſt work according to theſe rules. But this is not true: the conſequences only follow in the preſent ſyſtem of things; for that propoſition depends upon, and is derived from, the laws of motion laid down before; and theſe laws are derived from our experience in the preſent ſyſtem of things, and are therefore only the conſequence of the facts which occur to our daily experience and obſervation: and the great extent of ſuch conſequences, prove nothing more than this, that the author of ſuch laws has, it is true, given them a connection and conſiſtency; but it does not appear, that this is done from neceſſity, or according to abſolute wiſdom, but according to a wiſdom *relative* to the ſtate and condition of creatures capable of improvement by experience.

A ſtate

A ſtate of things is conceiveable, in which the ſame fact, or the ſame appearance, was never to be repeated: but mankind, according to their preſent circumſtances, could not exiſt in ſuch a ſtate. Laws of nature, fixed to that degree which we find them at preſent, ſeem to be neceſſary for enabling us to make a proper diſplay of our abilities; but, inſtead of underſtanding them in this ſenſe, which would be a means of teaching us proper notions of God and ourſelves, we are but too apt to found a preſumption of independence upon them.

What then do we learn from ſuch diſcoveries as Newton's? We extend our knowledge very conſiderably by them: we can correct many of our former prejudices; we can claſs things more naturally and ſimply. The falling of a ſtone to the earth; the motions of the planets; the ebbing and the flowing of the ſea, are all appearances claſſed by the vulgar under different heads, and are ſuppoſed to proceed from different cauſes, that is, are ſuppoſed to be regulated by different rules; whereas Newton has traced them all to the ſame principle, and this principle not an imaginary one, but ſuch as every one's daily experience convinces him does exiſt. Yet, what this principle is, any farther than that it proves its exiſtence, by producing effects, and that it does produce them in ſuch a particular manner, is no part of his buſineſs to determine. So that even here, where moſt has been done to the purpoſe, after a man of no common abilities has exerted his faculties to the utmoſt, he can never raiſe himſelf, properly ſpeaking, above the character of a ſpectator. One man may have proſpects more or leſs confuſed than another; and one man may ſee farther than another,

but

but ſtill they differ only as ſpectators. A clown carried to the ſurface of *Jupiter*, would ſee the ſtones fall there exactly in the ſame manner that Newton demonſtrates that they do; ſo that this journey would ſet them upon an equal footing in this reſpect.

CHAP. IV.

Containing ſome general Remarks upon this Plan of Education.

THE concluſion, therefore, to be drawn from this view of our progreſs in the different ſciences, is this: that by means of ſuch an education, we are better fitted for our ſtation in the world, we are made capable of more enjoyments, and rendered leſs liable to accidents. And notwithſtanding the frail and tranſitory nature of man, theſe advantages of education are not temporary, but permanent, as it is not a ſingle individual, but the whole ſpecies, which may be improved: learning not only gives a character to individuals, but alſo to nations; for by their attention to, or ignorance and neglect of, ſuch ſtudies, nations are juſtly denominated civilized or barbarous. And as to the prejudices which we are apt to contract, the experience of the world will remove them, unleſs we are careleſs or conceited obſervers.

The man of attentive obſervation will ſoon perceive, that ſchool-boys are, with great propriety, taught according to ſuch ſyſtems, but that men of the world muſt act and think upon different principles. All teaching ſhould undoubtedly be carried

ried on according to the ſimpleſt principles poſſible; and for this purpoſe, a liberty may be taken, of modifying things to that ſimplicity which is ſuited to our capacity in youth; and thus by the help of definitions we may form ſyſtems, by omitting every thing which is not immediately to our preſent purpoſe; but it is very abſurd to think that our omitting ſuch circumſtances will anihilate them and all their conſequences.

Language, laws, and the different forms of a commonwealth, are very much in our power to modify, with various other artificial *beings*, which men have created for themſelves; though the miſconception or miſapplication of the powers and faculties of men may be attended with the moſt ſerious conſequences. But as to the real cauſes and nature of things, it is eaſy to perceive that we are not advancing any nearer them by ſuch diſcoveries or improvements as we are able to make, either in the rational or the natural world. We have powers and faculties ſufficient for our preſent condition; but our freedom and independence, as far as we enjoy them, ought only to convince us that we are dependent upon ſuch a *Being* as every wiſe man would chuſe for his *protector*. For a careful examination of the ſtate of our minds during the different ſtages of our education, and the conſequences which follow from the different improvements of which our faculties are capable, may lead us to conclude, that the arrangement of the preſent ſyſtem of things ſeems to have been made, in many reſpects, with a view to our improvement; or if this may ſeem to make us of too much importance, that our faculties have been made in conformity to the nature of things. And thus the Supreme Being may be conſidered

conſidered as ſetting men taſks, like a teacher, to try and improve their faculties; ſetting things before them in ſuch an order, that if they make a proper uſe of their abilities, they ſhall be able to make great and important diſcoveries, when theſe are compared with our powers and circumſtances; but which fall away, and are to be conſidered as nothing, when compared with God's plans and deſigns. Or rather, in fact, they are nothing, unleſs relatively conſidered; it is the ſuppoſing ſuch a creature as man to exiſt, that gives them their truth and importance. And to pretend to extend our knowledge beyond theſe bounds, ſhews that we are but little acquainted with the nature of our own diſcoveries. And yet all thoſe who pretend that the ſchemes of Providence are in any reſpect ſubject to their examination and judgement, diſcover this ignorance; I mean, all thoſe who ſpeak of them in the ſtyle of criticiſm.

Our education is carried on upon a ſuppoſition that the things of this world are fixed, or in a regular and continual rotation; and that we have only the ſame things to ſee and do which have been ſeen and done before, or to rectify what our predeceſſors did amiſs, from want of attention only, without a ſuſpicion that there is any progreſs in the affairs of this world; that is, that any improvement might have happened in any one period as well as another, mankind having been always in poſſeſſion of the means of this improvement: and, in this reſpect, the whole courſe of our education, and the general courſe of the affairs of this world, create a ſtrong prejudice againſt a plan begun by God, and gradually unfolded to mankind ſupernaturally, and without the inſtrumentality of the wiſe men of this world:

and it is of the greateſt importance that we ſhould be put upon our guard againſt the conſequence of this prejudice. And for this purpoſe, when any thing is propoſed, upon which we are to exerciſe ourſelves, that we may form a rational belief, we are not to conſider whether it be the work of God *directly*, becauſe here, in this ſenſe, we have no ſtandard for examination, no determinate rule by which we can proceed; for this purpoſe, all our philoſophy is in vain; we are therefore to conſider the ſubject only *indirectly*, and ſee whether it is any human impoſition, which is propoſed to us as coming from a ſupernatural origin; and of theſe impoſitions, the more experience we have, we are ſo much the better enabled to judge; and by what we can know of man, we may be pretty poſitive in our deciſions concerning his works and views.

But it is the higheſt abſurdity, not to call it impiety, when we pretend to apply our reaſon in order to ſettle what plan it might be fit for the Supreme Being to purſue with regard to mankind, or to ſay what is proper or improper for him to do. And yet this is a prejudice very natural to the mind of man, and is not to be got the better of, as ſome have imagined, by keeping men in ignorance, but by improving their faculties; by conſidering the nature and weakneſs of them; by attending to the circumſtances of man in this world; and by making a proper eſtimate of the different degrees of knowledge which we are capable of acquiring, and of the ſeveral ends it may anſwer.

With the vulgar every thing is a matter of fact, which is admitted upon the evidence of teſtimony, as well as upon the evidence of their own ſenſes, with

with hardly any faculty of diſtinguiſhing between truth and falſhood. It is in a book, or ſuch a one has ſaid it, is ſufficient evidence for any thing. Such a fund of credulity would expoſe mankind to continual impoſitions.

On the other hand, the learned, with a ſtrong impreſſion of this weakneſs upon their minds, would wiſh to determine every thing by ſcientific principles, affecting to believe or diſbelieve every thing as it can or cannot be reduced to ſome mode of argumentation, with little regard to fact. It follows from ſuch principles, your facts are nothing to the purpoſe, ſhew me the fallacy in the reaſoning, ſays the man of ſcience.

The prejudices of the vulgar are corrected by learning; and the prejudices of the learned may be corrected by ſober-thinking, when they come to apply their reaſonings to matter of fact: thus falling back again among the vulgar, after their heads have ſettled from that fermentation which the novelty of ſcientific knowledge is apt to occaſion.

CHAP. V.

Of Atheiſm.

THE origin of ourſelves, and of the world, ſeems to be the moſt natural, and the moſt intereſting queſtion upon which the mind of man can employ itſelf. For beſides gratifying a very natural, and a very laudable curioſity, the propriety of our conduct in all circumſtances and ſtations of life; our hopes and fears are to be entirely regulated by rational opinions about our

origin and deſtination. To be left entirely in the dark, with regard to a ſubject of ſuch importance, would be a great misfortune to a rational creature. But we are not left ſo, for God has diſtinctly and hiſtorically delivered the facts to us, as fully as is neceſſary for us to know, and in a manner perfectly ſatisfactory to a vulgar underſtanding; yet not in ſuch a form as to pleaſe the artificial underſtandings of the learned. For the prejudices ariſing from the modes of education which I have been explaining in this book, put all learned men upon attempts to reduce every inquiry to ſome or other of the forms according to which they have been taught. And this prejudice is beſt removed, not immediately, by urging the authority of facts, which their minds are not prepared to receive, but by giving the queſtion a fair examination, according to their own philoſophic principles; becauſe when theſe are found inſufficient, every man ought ſo far to get the better of his reaſoning pride, as to have the modeſty to own that he is, in this reſpect, but one of the vulgar.

Being as much a friend to reaſon as any one, but fully convinced, not barely, of the inſufficiency of it, in the ſolution of the preſent queſtion, but even of the abſurdity of applying it upon this occaſion, I ſhall, however, in compliance with prejudice, examine the ſeveral atheiſtical ſuppoſitions, and give them a fair trial, according to the commonly received modes of argumentation, which ought to diſcover the ſtrength or weakneſs of ſuch ſuppoſitions to the ſatisfaction of the preſent generation, if the received forms of reaſoning be adhered to.

If

If the plan and nature of things be deducible from mechanical principles, it muſt be from thoſe principles, and according to that method of reaſoning, adopted by thoſe philoſophers who have been moſt ſucceſsful in their inquiries into natural appearances. My intention, therefore, is to examine, according to ſuch principles as have been ſo judiciouſly applied by Newton, the different ſuppoſitions that have been made concerning the cauſe and manner of the exiſtence of things, as far as they are ſupported by experience; rejecting only thoſe principles, which are not true, that is, which do not diſcover their exiſtence by experiment, or by their natural effects; or if they are true, and do exiſt, are nevertheleſs inſufficient for explaining the appearances referred to them as effects proceeding from ſuch cauſes.

And this method muſt be obſerved, otherwiſe we do nothing but dream; becauſe it is an indiſpenſible rule, that in aſſigning a cauſe for any thing, it muſt be ſuch as is known to produce effects, or by experiment may be made to produce effects; and is alſo ſufficient for explaining all appearances referred to it as a cauſe; that is, the effects muſt be an accurate meaſure for its known operations. Thus, when it is ſaid, that gravity is the cauſe of the ebbing and flowing of the ſea, before that this can be admitted philoſophically, it muſt be ſhewn that there is ſuch a thing as gravity producing effects; and moreover that gravity is known to operate in ſuch a manner as to produce exactly the effect aſcribed to it, and neither one greater or leſs.

In the ſame manner, it ſeems but reaſonable to require, that, if any thing be aſſigned as the cauſe of the exiſtence of the world, it muſt be ſuch a

one as has powers and qualities in it, capable of producing all the various effects obſervable in the univerſe. For without this precaution, we ſuffer ourſelves to be deluded in a manner that diſcovers greater weakneſs than the vulgar ſhew when they give credit to every thing that is told them as a fact. I believe ſuch a thing, becauſe it is the ſuppoſition of ſuch a man. It would be juſt as reaſonable to do it, becauſe it is the dream of ſuch a man.

But this kind of weakneſs is ſupported by an opinion, that any hypotheſis is fully, or at leaſt ſatisfactorily proved, by ſuch an evidence as is ſufficient for ſupporting the credit of an hiſtorical fact. But this is not true: circumſtances alone are ſufficient often to eſtabliſh the certainty of an hiſtorical fact, inſtances of which will readily occur to every one; whereas circumſtances, if there be nothing elſe, ought always to render an hypotheſis ſuſpicious; for the hypotheſis has no ſeparate exiſtence from the inventor, and therefore muſt come from the head of the inventor in all its poſſible perfection: and circumſtantial proof ſhews directly that its foundation is weak, this being its only ſupport; and for this reaſon I claſs all ſuch hypotheſes among the more rational kind of dreams.

Keeping theſe things in view, let us conſider the different ſuppoſitions that have been made to account for the origin of the world. And firſt, it has been ſaid, that a fortuitous concourſe of atoms produced every thing. Now this ſuppoſition labours under every poſſible difficulty, and is chargeable beſides with ignorance and abſurdity. For, firſt, it ſhifts the queſtion, as if the inquiry was not about the cauſe of the exiſtence of things,

but only about the modes of their exiſtence: and even here it fails, for there is no evidence that things were ever in ſuch a ſtate; or even if that were to be granted, there is the ſame difficulty in accounting for the motion of atoms, as of the largeſt bodies; and the thinking otherwiſe ariſes from a childiſh and vulgar prejudice: becauſe we can move a grain of ſand eaſier than a mountain, a child would be excuſed for ſuppoſing the original ſource of motion different in bodies of different bulk: yet nothing is more certain than this, that a ſingle grain of ſand would revolve in the orbit of the moon, exactly in the ſame manner that the moon herſelf does.

But there is no neceſſity for talking ſo philoſophically upon the preſent occaſion. For let any one read Lucretius with care, and he will be convinced that the poet is ſo far from being able to compute the effects of mechanical principles, that he does not know even how to deſcribe them. So that his atoms, inſtead of forming ſenſible and rational creatures, if they had followed his directions, they never could have formed any of the crudeſt parts of matter.

This ſyſtem is the effort of a child to philoſophize, upon the firſt opening of its eyes, diſcovering ſomething like a capacity for thinking, but without the power, the imperfection of its organs converting every thing into prejudice. Thus we conſtantly hear of up and down, perpendicular and oblique, as if theſe exiſted in the nature of things, and were not entirely relative.

CHAP. VI.

The ſame ſubject continued.

A Second ſuppoſition is, that a *plaſtic* nature, deſigning but unintelligent, has formed every thing. And as this ſuppoſition pretends to be founded upon a kind of experience, it will be proper to examine how far appearances will ſupport it, or what circumſtances have led men to reſt contented with ſuch concluſions.

Now, allowing the moſt that we can to the maintainers of this opinion; nothing more is to be diſcovered in this plaſtic nature, than a power of continuing the ſpecies of things; which is very different from accounting for their coming into being at firſt, or ſhewing us how this nature acquired thoſe powers by which it is enabled to preſerve theſe ſeveral kinds. For if this deſigning, unintelligent, plaſtic nature has a power in itſelf to produce new kinds of things, it is impoſſible that it ſhould ever ſtop, but it muſt go on producing new kinds of things without end, which is expreſly contrary to experience. For deſign in the ſenſe here made uſe of is inconſiſtent with free agency.

But moreover there muſt be as many plaſtic powers, as there are different kinds of things to be produced, or more properly there muſt be a plaſtic power in every individual thing. And even when monſters are produced, it is only two deſigning natures counteracting each others deſigns; and by their united efforts producing ſomething directly contrary to the deſigns of each, with-

without a power to vary their deſigns, and accommodate them to circumſtances, ſo as to make ſomething new and not monſtrous; that is, ſomething that can generate a new ſpecies. Which proves that theſe powers are not agents, but inſtruments, and that God, by permitting monſters to be produced, means to exhibit to mankind an experimental refutation of this ſyſtem, by ſhewing what would be the conſequence if theſe plaſtic powers were made to act of themſelves.

However, let us ſuppoſe that a tree deſigns to produce a tree; an animal, or rather two animals, an animal of the ſame kind; and that a body at reſt, or in motion, deſigns to perſevere in its preſent ſtate; how can we be ſaid, by all theſe conceſſions, to be come the leaſt nearer our concluſion, which was to account for the origin of things; becauſe it ſtill remains to be ſhewn whence theſe agents are themſelves, and whence they derived their powers, which are too viſible in their effects to ſuffer us to regard them as *non-entities.*

And more eſpecially it remains to be ſhewn what it is that makes all theſe various, and even contrary natures or deſigns, co-operate in producing a regular ſyſtem, every part of which tends regularly and orderly to the ſame end. For allowing that the random exertion of all theſe natures, however contradictory, muſt produce ſomething, yet ſurely the man who would expect from ſuch a fortuitous concourſe of deſigns, ſo much of life, ſenſe, and rationality, which are ſo liable to accidents, and muſt, according to this ſuppoſition, be ſo much expoſed; ſuch a man, I ſay, would have little claim to rationality, of which he has ſo inadequate a conception.

For

For even if we conſider this world as a machine, it is neverthelefs a machine which required an artificer, who in its formation muſt have proceeded according to a plan, the proper execution of which neceſſarily implies a perfect knowledge of the parts of which his ſyſtem was to be formed, and a perfect acquaintance with the nature of his materials: that is, it required at leaſt an intelligent *Being*, whoſe knowledge muſt be as unlimited as the materials which he has to work with; and without a creative power, it will be difficult to ſay where he got his materials, otherwiſe the materials which he had to work with, admitting the abſurd ſuppoſition of a *chaos*, might and would certainly counteract his deſigns; which would certainly happen likewiſe, as they are ſuppoſed to have powers in themſelves, if he had not a command over their natures. This ſuppoſition, therefore, of a plaſtic power, being alſo totally unfit for explaining the appearances of nature, is to be rejected upon the principles before laid down, becauſe even a general *plaſtic* power in the earth could do nothing without the concurrence of the ſun, or perhaps of the whole ſolar ſyſtem.

Indeed ſuch an hypotheſis could only be taken up for this reaſon, that as the vulgar are naturally diſpoſed to believe every thing that is propoſed as a fact, ſo the firſt ſmattering in philoſophy diſpoſes us to receive whatever comes to us in any form of reaſoning. A giant ſwallowing windmills, is food for a vulgar underſtanding, and a philoſopher, laying aſide the antiquated methods of meaſuring time by the ſun and ſtars, which were appointed by God "for ſigns, and for ſea-"ſons, and for days and years," and portioning it out with a leſs ſparing hand by *ſtratums of lava*,

is

is delicious entertainment for the learned, eſpecially when ſeaſoned with a little impiety. Surely a particular providence preſided over this new inſtrument of computation, making the winds always blow with the ſame force, and in the ſame direction, with a particular proviſion for always keeping the ſame quantity of burning matter within, and of earth upon the ſides of the mountain to be waſhed down by the rains which muſt always fall in the ſame proportion, and with the ſame force, with a thouſand other ſupplies too tedious to mention, but abſolutely neceſſary for ſetting this new chronometer in motion.

CHAP. VII.

The Subject continued.

BEING thus neceſſarily brought to acknowledge a deſigning intelligent cauſe, before we can give any thing like a rational account of the formation, or even of the preſervation of the univerſe, we may be conſidered as having got clear of Atheiſm and its conſequences. However, we find authors maintaining all theſe principles, and yet endeavouring to draw ſuch conſequences from them, as will leave mankind (at leaſt in as far as they are rational creatures) in much the ſame ſituation as if there was no God. For it is ſuppoſed, that the whole univerſe is made up of a chain of *Beings*, the parts of which chain are all linked together in ſuch a manner, and in ſuch an order, as to be abſolutely neceſſary for the ſupport of each other in that very order and manner, without the poſſibility of admitting any change: and that this chain not only binds the things together,

but

but likewiſe, if it does not bind, yet it confines the author, however powerful or intelligent, ſo far, at leaſt, that he cannot change their order or nature, without degrading his own character, which, being perfect, ſay they, any change is impoſſible. Neither, according to this ſuppoſition, can he have any proper motive for preferring one part of his works before another; but manifeſts himſelf as fully and as perfectly in a *hair* as in a *heart*; and ſees, with equal indifference, *a hero periſh, and a ſparrow fall.* I ſhould be glad to know if any man, who has proper notions of free-agency, would not think himſelf degraded by being ſo confined. But theſe opinions are the effects of ſin, and ſuch ſpeculations are the *artificial* fig-leaves which philoſophical ingenuity is ſewing together to hide the nakedneſs of mankind.

The misfortune is, that theſe opinions, by dropping the abſurdeſt parts of Atheiſm, are calculated to have great weight with thoſe who are only ſmatterers in philoſophy, and pick up their opinions from accidental converſation and ſuperficial reading. And where diſcoveries and ſyſtems are the ſubject of general diſcourſe, every one is deſirous to know ſomething of the matter; particularly where religion is concerned; becauſe its threats are ſufficient to draw the attention of every one, ſo far at leaſt as to make him ſeek for arguments to engage him heartily in a compliance with its precepts, or ſuch as may induce him to diſregard them. And to gratify the humour of thoſe, who have reaſon to wiſh that religion ſhould be found to be an impoſition, little ſyſtems are formed, in which every thing difficult is omitted, and where the authors are very careful to keep out of ſight whatever might occaſion the leaſt

leaſt doubts: and a man has only to ſhut his eyes, and he may be perfectly ſatisfied that he comprehends the whole courſe of nature: and this we are well diſpoſed to do: for a man finds himſelf much more at his eaſe, by truſting to ſuch ſyſtems, than when he has to combat with all the ſcruples of his own conſcience, and all the imperfections of his own underſtanding; eſpecially as this buſineſs is ſo eaſy, for he has only to learn a kind of philoſophical language, and the work is done.

What we know of the prodigious ſize of the heavenly bodies, their ſplendour, ſituation, and regular motions might furniſh much moral and religious inſtruction. But without reſting where we ought, by keeping within the natural limits of the human underſtanding, even the philoſopher himſelf is often hurried out of the path of experiment, obſervation, and computation, into a region where he has nothing to do but gaze with the vulgar; and perplex his underſtanding upon infinite ſpace and time, and fatigue his mind with ſpeculations upon the operations which infinite power and infinite wiſdom may perform in theſe.

This is a true *fairy land*, as much as the imaginations of the vulgar, only we ſeparate ourſelves from them, by making a parade with the laws of nature. Every thing muſt have its laws; nor is the Supreme Being himſelf exempted from this neceſſity. During this amazement of the underſtanding, the paſſions, which never *ſlumber nor ſleep*, put in their claim for a *plenary indulgence*, as a thing of no account, where ſo much has been given, or rather this indulgence is declared to be a law of nature alſo. And to ſupport the claim, advantage has been taken of this ſtate of mind, to give us a mean opinion of human nature,

by

by rallying us upon the abſurd ſuppoſition that ſuch a creature as man, or ſuch an atom as his habitation, could be ſuppoſed without the moſt extravagant partiality, and the moſt ridiculous ſelf-conceit, to be, as it were, the particular care of Providence.

This is to take advantage of that natural love of order which is ſo agreeable to the mind, (becauſe, without order, things would be unmanageable by ſuch limited creatures) to lead us from attending to our own circumſtances, and engage us in the admiration of an imaginary harmony and gradation, which, if true, would deprive us of every diſtinguiſhing privilege, except that of being extremely miſerable, by having our nobleſt faculties baffled, and left without any objects to gratify them; becauſe the advocates for this ſyſtem pretend that God *acts by general, not by partial laws.* Hence their doctrine is, that if we could ſee ourſelves without partiality, we have no right to conſider ourſelves in any other light but only as making a part in the preſent ſyſtem of things, in the ſame manner as the ſun and moon, or any other of the parts and appendages of the univerſe, and conſequently as liable to thoſe accidents, and capable of receiving thoſe benefits, which the general laws of the ſyſtem produce, without having any thing farther to hope or fear. And according to this reaſoning, a reſurrection of the dead would be the moſt abſurd of all expectations.

This is an error that it very much concerns us to remove, or at leaſt to be well aſſured that it is no error; becauſe, if this be a true ſtate of the caſe, our chief wiſdom would be ſhewn in making it our conſtant maxim, "Let us eat and drink,

"for

" for to-morrow we die." For any man, with his maxin of *whatever is, is right*, might very conſiſtently anſwer to the moſt ſolid demonſtration of the exiſtence and attributes of God, *this is all very fine, and very true; but it is no concern of mine;*

" I am but part of one ſtupendous whole,
" Whoſe body nature is, and God the ſoul;"

and what conceit and preſumption would it be in me to expect that this great harmony and order is to be broke through on my account.

This is not the language of a man who has inquired carefully into natural appearances, but rather that of a ſuperficial novice in natural ſpeculation, who believes in the diſcoveries of others, without the leaſt acquaintance with the principles which led to them; and taking the concluſions upon truſt, draws ſome unphiloſophical conſequences from them, to humour his own diſpoſition or circumſtances; and therefore may very naturally be ſuppoſed to overlook the abilities neceſſary for making ſuch diſcoveries. Otherwiſe it muſt ſeem very ſtrange, if a man ſhould return from ſuch a noble exertion of his abilities, as the weighing the ſolar ſyſtem in a balance, with a notion that he himſelf was too contemptible to be *particularly* regarded by the great Creator, who had given ſuch proof of the contrary by beſtowing upon him faculties ſo admirably fitted for comprehending his works.

But the truth is, Newton had never the leaſt glimpſe of this chain; it was borrowed from Plato, who, for want of better information, was reduced to amuſe himſelf with ſuch reveries, and gilded over with ſome of the moſt ſolid matter of modern diſcovery,

diſcovery, by a man whoſe knowledge was not the effect of regular ſtudy, but gleaned up from random reading, and random converſation, among wits, buffoons, politicians, and philoſophers. Such an education, joined to a lively imagination, and principles and practice which ought to make a man wiſh to render Atheiſm palatable to himſelf and the world, might give ſome proſpect of brilliancy and daring obſervation, but little of ſolidity or conſiſtency.

The dangerous tendency of ſuch a ſyſtem as this, is undoubtedly very great to thoſe who are naturally diſpoſed to believe only what ſuits their convenience. For it leaves no morality either with God or man, and yet pretends to give an order and regularity to the affairs of the univerſe, ſufficient to ſatisfy thoſe who are diſpoſed to paſs through this world with their eyes ſhut.

But the order and regularity which we ſee in the world, will be found, by the attentive obſerver, rather a neceſſary compliance with human weakneſs, which requires it, than any way directing and influencing the plans of God, which can depend upon nothing but his own will and pleaſure, and leaſt of all upon the fooliſh imaginations of men. And a proper attention to the dignity of human nature, will go a great way to cure every one of this extravagant folly.

CHAP. VIII.

Of the Dignity of Human Nature.

IT is no doubt a lawful, and even a proper uſe of ſpeculations upon the nature of things, to apply them as arguments for curing us of our pride and preſumption; but if they be carried ſo far as to give us a mean opinion of mankind in general, the deſtruction of morality and religion will be the conſequence, as far as it is in the power of man to deſtroy them. The contemplation of nature is propoſed, with great propriety, as a proper exerciſe for making us humble, and ſenſible of our dependence upon God, and thankful for the great things which he has done for us: yet, that man knows but little of his own faculties, who thinks that he has reaſon to look upon himſelf as degraded by a compariſon of the human ſpecies with the other parts of the creation.

Whoever finds himſelf in danger of falling into ſuch an opinion, ſhould look out for arguments to inſpire him with a proper ſenſe of the dignity of human nature, and of the perfection of which it may be capable, notwithſtanding its preſent degeneracy: as without proper notions upon this ſubject, it is impoſſible to behave with propriety in the different relations in which we ſtand to our Creator and fellow-creatures, or to have our minds prepared to receive the inſtructions which God may condeſcend to give us in a ſupernatural way.

For if we have aſſumed to ourſelves a rank in the creation to which we have no title, and ſhould

be deſervedly degraded below the place which we had aſſumed; it is an obvious conſequence from this, that all our relations in which we ſtand to the Creator and his works, will be changed, and a new conduct and behaviour will of courſe become our duty.

This, indeed, the infidels are ſo ſenſible of, that they deſpair of making a man a convert to their opinions, before they have given him a mean opinion of himſelf. And for this purpoſe, it is their conſtant aim to debaſe human nature as much as poſſible, treating the hopes of immortality as a vain conceit, engendered by pride, and a ſtrong prejudice in favour of our own importance. Thus it is the general practice of infidel writers to dwell upon the weakneſſes and corruptions of human nature, not with a view to reform them, or even to expreſs any indignation againſt them, but rather to palliate them, by inſinuating ſlyly, that were it not for a competent ſhare of hypocriſy, all the world would put on the ſame appearance that the worſt part of it does at preſent.

And, indeed, if we give up the dignity of our nature, according to the infidel plan, all the arguments, either for natural or revealed religion, are nothing to us. For we are no more concerned with the exiſtence of God, than the beaſts of the field, until we have ſome conviction from the ſuperior excellence of the faculties that he has beſtowed upon us, and the many things that are obviouſly made to be ſubſervient to us, that he regards us ſo particularly as to juſtify us in preſuming that he has vouchſafed to govern us by laws which are neither reducible to thoſe of matter and motion, nor yet to mere ſenſation, which is what theſe philoſophers labour to prove by arguments

ments very weak when referred to an accurate ſtandard of truth, but very powerful when addreſſed to certain paſſions and prejudices.

Although they pretend that their God is an intelligent Being, yet it is clear that he is not the God of the Pſalmiſt, who "hath made man to "have dominion over the works of his hands, "and hath put all things under his feet, all ſheep "and oxen, yea, and the beaſts of the field: the "fowl of the air, and the fiſh of the ſea, and what-"ſoever paſſeth through the paths of the ſeas."

If theſe things are facts, it is plain that the ſuppoſitions of theſe philoſophers are ſo far from being ſufficient for explaining the appearances of nature; that the appearances of nature directly contradict them, and conſequently they are to be rejected. And how far they are facts, deſerves to be conſidered by every one who pretends to depend upon reaſon for his inſtruction, as the conſequences of this examination ought to direct the rational conduct of ſuch a one's life.

I ſhall, therefore, endeavour to ſhew, that man is endued with faculties which naturally, and in a certain ſenſe, make the whole creation ſubject to him, or ſubſervient to his purpoſes; and that, as to what has been advanced concerning a chain of *beings* riſing in gradation, it is intirely unſupported by experience: the human race being ſo unlike every thing in this lower world, that nothing but the moſt ſenſeleſs partiality and prejudice could ever conſider man as making a link in any chain of *beings*, but as the lord of this lower world, and, under God, the diſpoſer of the things in it.

The people that I have to do with at preſent, allow of intelligence and deſign in the *firſt cauſe* of

all things. Matter, therefore, as ſuch, being ſenſeleſs and inanimate, and conſequently incapable of enjoyment, could never have been created for its own ſake, but for the convenience of ſome other *being* capable of enjoyment. And as the ſame authors will allow of no ſuch thing as a revelation, the excellence or ſuperiority of one kind of *being* above another, muſt be determined by the perfection of their different faculties. And upon this principle it will be very evident that the brute animals are created for our uſe, upon a compariſon of our faculties with theirs.

And to begin this compariſon from our birth, we may obſerve that man is brought into the world in a very helpleſs condition, compared with the other animals, who are born with the intire uſe of their faculties, and ſeem perfectly acquainted with their ſituation very ſoon after their entrance into the world. But we, on the other hand, are ſo much ſtrangers to our habitation and ſituation in the world, and ſo little acquainted with the inſtruments that we are to work with, that it requires time and experience and care and teaching to bring our faculties to perfection; and in thoſe inſtances where we are left to ourſelves, it is no eaſy matter to find out the proper means of acquiring ſuch knowledge as may enable us to make a proper judgement of our circumſtances; and ages and generations of men have been exhauſted in experiments to teach us how to turn our faculties to the beſt account, without diſcovering the extent of them. And whilſt we are drawn aſide by a thouſand circumſtances and temptations out of thoſe paths which the experience and ingenuity of others have marked out as leading to truth and happineſs; the beaſts, by truſting to their ſenſations,

tions, without experience or teaching, act agreeably to their nature and faculties; which makes it a general law of this nature of theirs, that they have no other means of excelling one another, but in bodily ſtrength, and in the number and qualities of their organs of ſenſation: for they have literally nothing but what they have received, no talents to improve; and are as much determined in their actions by the force of their ſenſations, as the movements of a machine are determined by the weights which put it in motion. It is impoſſible for them to give up a preſent good for a future one in proſpect. It is true, theſe ſenſations do not act ſo regularly as the weights of a clock; for the ſenſes of animals, from the delicacy of their organs, are more liable to be out of order than the groſſer parts of matter. Their organs of ſenſation are no doubt oftener out of order than we may apprehend, which accidents may occaſion deviations from the original laws of their nature; but upon this account they are no more anſwerable for their actions, than a blind man is for miſſing his way. And yet deviations ariſing entirely from a change in their ſenſations, may be miſtaken by ſuperficial obſervers, for a kind of free-agency, and the effect of a kind of intellectual principle. But if we conſider this ſubject attentively, we ſhall find all appearances juſtifying us in concluding that the brute creation are connected with each other, and with the different parts of the univerſe, only by their ſenſations, and conſequently incapable either of morality or religion. One action of theirs may be more pernicious than another; but one of their actions cannot be ſaid to be better than another, in ſuch a ſenſe as that it could be ſtyled virtuous or vicious.

And as their paſſions and affections can never be carried beyond the immediate objects of their ſenſes, they can never form any bond of union among themſelves, or reſolve upon any future projects, or acquire notions of relations; and this makes them incapable of what is called knowledge; neither can they either make or acquire an artificial language. In ſhort, all their powers and faculties fully prove that they have no more connection with the Supreme Being, than the inanimate parts of the creation, and particularly that a future ſtate would be uſeleſs to them. Every attempt to communicate knowledge to them, furniſhes new arguments in ſupport of this opinion; for nothing can draw them from their ſenſes; and if we would take off their attention from the objects of one ſenſe, we have no other means of doing it, but by fixing their attention upon the objects of another ſenſe: for that kind of perſuaſion will not avail here, which engages the attention by the proſpect of a *general*, abſent or future good.

Therefore, though there may be different and more excellent faculties enjoyed by one animal than another, yet this difference is only perceivable by a rational creature, and has no exiſtence in the opinions of the creatures themſelves. They never envy the faculties of each other, nor repine at their own ſituation: we cannot, therefore, with propriety conſider one of them as excelling another in knowledge, but rather that they are all equally without underſtanding: the ſeeming difference in their actions ariſing entirely from the difference in their ſenſations, and any change in their actions only following from a change in their ſenſations.

It is even left to man to put their powers and faculties to their proper uſes; ſo that their excellence and defects may be conſidered rather as having place with relation to him than themſelves; which gives him a natural, and conſequently a lawful dominion over them, by applying them to the different purpoſes for which ſuch faculties are fit, being only obliged to uſe them as ſenſible creatures.

Now let us conſider, on the other hand, the nature and condition of man. Our connection with the body, is not only leſs than that of the brutes, upon our entrance into the world; but even through life we carry on our views often undiſturbed by the moſt earneſt ſolicitations of the ſenſes. And there are evident marks, as ſoon as we come into the world, that the ſoul perceives itſelf in a ſtrange habitation, and in rather unnatural circumſtances: and this one may be allowed to advance from experience, without pretending to enter into any of the opinions concerning the origin of the ſoul; for if tears and crying be any indication of uneaſineſs, the human race, at their firſt appearance in this world, exhibit the ſigns of the junction of two ſubſtances together which do not well accord, the mind at leaſt expreſſing all the marks of diſcontent then in its power.

As we advance farther in life, we are found employing ourſelves upon trifles for which no motives can be diſcovered, either from reaſon or ſenſation: ſo that the follies of the idleſt coxcomb, no leſs than the ſublime diſcoveries of a Newton, prove that we poſſeſs faculties which cannot poſſibly derive their origin from the laws of matter and motion, nor even from ſenſation, which makes it impoſſible to account for the moſt trifling and

fooliſh actions of men, without having recourſe to ſomething reſiding within the body, not eſſentially connected with it, endued with a will and faculties of its own; and making uſe of the body and its different ſenſes, often in ſuch a fooliſh, and often in ſuch an ingenious manner, as proves ſufficiently that the powers and organs of the body are only inſtruments for executing its purpoſes. And the ſubſtance endued with theſe powers and faculties, is what we call mind; and it is worth our particular notice, that this mind, inſtead of being confined to obſerve the laws of matter and motion, or even of ſenſation, it always can, and often does act expreſly contrary to both. And even the moſt fooliſh ſtare of an idiot, has an expreſſion in it which diſtinguiſhes him remarkably from the brute creation, and clearly diſcovers ſomething labouring to work with improper inſtruments.

There is a mode of moral inſtruction drawn from a compariſon of the behaviour of men and beaſts, much uſed by ſatyriſts and writers of fables, which I can by no means approve of, as it has a tendency to debaſe human nature, inſtead of improving it. Neither are theſe applications juſt, their faculties are ſo different from ours. I am the more confident that this is the right opinion, becauſe our Saviour, who inſtructs by parables, never makes uſe of this method. He never ſends men to improve their morality by obſerving the actions of the beaſts; it would have been to offer an inſult to human nature, which could not be expected from one who, though ſorry for its imperfections, yet has ſhewn by what he did for us, that he had too high a ſenſe of its dignity, to make ſuch an inſulting compariſon.

But

But let us conſider a little more particularly the powers and peculiarities of the human mind. And firſt, we may obſerve, that whoever attends to its operations in infancy, will be very apt to conſider the mind as equally infirm with the body, exhibiting little or nothing of thoſe powers by which one could judge of the uncommon faculties of a human ſoul. Yet no ſooner has it received, from external objects, materials to work with, than it diſplays its extraordinary powers, not only by the eagerneſs which we diſcover in ſeeking after knowledge, but alſo by the ſeveral new faculties which make their appearance; when circumſtances call them forth into action, in order to arrange, to judge of, and communicate the knowledge which has been acquired. The different aſſociations of our notions, according to their reſemblance, contrariety, and other relations, diſcover ſurprizing abilities, and give us a great command over our own thoughts, and likewiſe over many of the things with which we are connected. For theſe aſſociations are the foundation of artificial language and written characters, by means of which we are enabled, at any diſtance of place and time, to communicate our ſentiments to each other. And thus the powers of the human mind are greateſt where it has ſeemingly no materials to work with, for language and written characters are arbitrary things: and yet certain ſounds and characters have, in a wonderful manner, the power of conveying to us diſtinctly the thoughts of others, not only when our mind is employed about material objects, but alſo when the objects are barely mental conceptions, or even nonſenſe.

This power of inventing language and writing, or even the capacity of acquiring a ſkill in them, won-

wonderfully characterizes our *ſpecies*, and diſtinguiſhes us remarkably from all other animals, and, as it were, fixes a boundary between us and them. And yet, language and writing being common to mankind in general, at leaſt the faculty of acquiring them, we are apt to overlook their high importance, and likewiſe the prodigious extent of abilities which the invention, or even communication of them diſcover.

But in making an eſtimate of the dignity of human nature, they ought to be particularly conſidered, eſpecially as the brutes diſcover no ſuch powers, or rather ſhew that they are entirely without them; and as theſe very powers are thoſe by which mankind particularly diſplay their abilities.

Some brute animals may be brought to aſſociate objects with ſenſations, which, being naturally aſſociated, require no ſuppoſition of abilities to perform it, but only to be ſuſceptible of habits; but they are totally incapable of thoſe arbitrary aſſociations, which ſo fully demonſtrate the powers of man.

Let us next obſerve the faculty of memory, if its operations were not ſo familiar to us, they would appear not only incredible to us, but even impoſſible for us to comprehend; and according to our uſual ſelf-ſufficiency, we would be pronouncing the very ſuppoſition of ſuch powers an abſurdity. For inſtance, how faithfully does this faculty repreſent paſt tranſactions, a ſingle veſtige of which is no where elſe to be found or ſeen: and what variety of different kinds of knowledge may the mind lay up in ſtore by its means, without producing the leaſt confuſion. If, indeed, we attempt to account for the operations of this faculty, we can give no more reaſon why we remember a

thing, than if we had it ſuggeſted to us by inſpiration, or in any ſupernatural way.

Let us next obſerve the vaſt powers of the imagination, which makes us, in ſome reſpects, *creators*; for by this faculty we are enabled to mould our conceptions into whatever ſhape we pleaſe, and thus we can make, as it were, creations of our own, and communicate diſtinct ideas of them to others. And although we are naturally confined to a very ſmall ſpot of ground, and a ſhort period of time, yet by the aſſiſtance of the imagination, we are able to ſurpaſs theſe narrow limits, being qualified by its powers to make ourſelves, as it were, ſpectators of paſt and diſtant tranſactions, throwing off, in ſome meaſure, the incumberances of matter.

How wonderfully is the mind furniſhed with faculties for giving us a reliſh of natural and artificial productions! How forcibly are we led to improvement of every kind, by that ſtrong propenſity which we diſcover to any thing new or uncommon, and which becomes a ſpur to all our inquiries! What aweful impreſſions do we receive from grandeur and magnificence, and from every thing that has a tendency to inſpire ſublime notions! What pleaſure do we receive from the beauty of colour and proportion: and how is the mind elevated and ſoothed with the harmony and melody of ſounds! But more eſpecially, what a wonderful uniformity of contrivance is exhibited in the formation of man; that all minds ſhould be formed ſo nearly alike in their faculties, as to receive exactly the ſame notions and impreſſions from the ſame objects, and likewiſe from the ſame exerciſe of the thinking faculty! And this uniformity is ſo great, that where the ſubject has been

been attentively conſidered, and comes properly within the reach of our faculties, it requires all our ingenuity to create matter of difference, by diſtinctions and ambiguous language, when our paſſions or intereſt ſeem to make a diverſity of opinions uſeful. Or elſe the difference ariſes from our meddling with ſubjects beyond the reach of our faculties, or applying an imaginary, though perhaps a faſhionable teſt of truth.

This affords occaſion, materials, and opportunity for a new faculty called reaſon, to exert itſelf: whoſe office it is to adjuſt and regulate our notions according to the particular nature of every ſubject; which produces firſt a diverſity of ſentiments, and, it is to be hoped, in time will produce that harmony among our opinions, which is ſo agreeable to the mind.

But farther, when men come to be united together in ſocieties, this union gives riſe to various relations, which furniſh ſcope for a new ſet of faculties to exert themſelves, which muſt have lain dormant in the individual, for want of proper opportunities to call them forth. And theſe form what we call the moral part of our nature, at leaſt it is this which gives ſcope to the moral faculties to operate. And without ſociety, it would have been impoſſible for the acuteſt underſtanding to have formed any notion of them. It may be ſaid, indeed, that without ſociety none of our faculties could exert themſelves; but this cannot be ſaid in the ſame extenſive ſenſe that it may be applied to our moral powers. And this is an important conſideration: for as the mind is not limited in its capacity, it is hard to ſay how far our faculties may be enlarged, and new ones brought into view, by aſſociating with *beings* of different orders,

orders, which intercourſe may give riſe to new relations, and new ſources of information, without end.

Here we leave the beaſts entirely behind us, who are not able to improve their faculties, or extend their relations, even by the opportunities which they have of aſſociating with mankind, who are ſo much their ſuperiors.

The dignity of human nature even appears in our refuſing inſtruction, as it ſhews that our improvement is not ſo much a natural conſequence of our faculties and circumſtances, as a free act of our own will.

Many a man has neglected to acquire ſome branch of uſeful knowledge, for no better reaſon, than that it was poſſeſſed in perfection by a man whom he diſliked or deſpiſed, or becauſe ſome perſon, whoſe abilities he held in high eſtimation, was ignorant of it. And many ſuch things, which are real imperfections in the individual, ſerve to characterize us and give a dignity to human nature, by raiſing it above the laws of matter and motion, and the no leſs conſtant ones of ſenſation.

But upon another account, it is of great importance to dwell upon this conſideration of our capacity for improvement; as it muſt be a very pleaſing proſpect for ſuch creatures as we are to look forward into futurity, which it is ſo natural for man to do, and to imagine the improvement which our mind may receive in the ſociety of various orders of beings; or if this may be too much a work of fancy, it ought at leaſt to open our ears to the revelation which God has been pleaſed to grant us, which prejudices and worldly wiſdom have been but too ſucceſsful in ſhutting.

And

And thus I think that proper meditations upon the dignity of human nature, according to ſuch a plan as is here only hinted at, will convince every one that there is no foundation in nature for that hypotheſis, which links the preſent ſyſtem of things together ſo as to form a chain which muſt be deſtroyed if any link be broken.

The gradation among the beaſts is imaginary with reſpect to themſelves, for they are totally inſenſible of excellence and defect; and never compare themſelves with each other, in order to derive from the compariſon matter of pride or humiliation; diſcontent or ſatisfaction; nor do they diſcover any ſigns of an improving nature: an additional ſenſe gives them no advantages of which they ſeem to be ſenſible, neither is the loſs of one an occaſion of repining; in ſhort, what they poſſeſs ſeems to be the meaſure of every thing to them. And as all their excellence and defects are relative to man; this proves, in the ſtrongeſt manner, that one great end of their creation was for the uſe of man; notwithſtanding the quaint repartee;

"And man for mine replies a pamper'd gooſe."

THE END OF THE THIRD BOOK.

BOOK

BOOK IV.

Of the Evidence of the Chriſtian Religion.

CHAP. I.

Of Infidelity.

THE vices of the ancients were enormous, whether we conſider their cruelty or their luſts. Among them human nature was degraded, vilified, and corrupted to the laſt degree. Their very religion was contrived on purpoſe to free the mind from the natural ſtings of conſcience, by giving them a ſyſtematic method of indulging all their paſſions upon principle occaſionally, and from the example of their gods, whenever they had an opportunity. The obſervance of their religious ceremonies conſiſted only in feaſting and indulging their paſſions, without laying any reſtraint upon their lives, and conſequently could be no great hardſhip upon the votaries. And upon ſuch eaſy terms, who would not be religious. All theſe things Chriſtianity has aboliſhed, and in their ſtead has laid great reſtraints upon human nature, which produce great and viſible effects in the world.

It is true, individuals may be found now that indicate ſtrongly a diſpoſition to be as cruel and as

as vicious as the worſt of the antients. But they are obliged to ſtop ſhort, becauſe the world will not bear them out, and countenance them in their vices, nor ſuffer any thing to be done openly that greatly contradicts the genuine principles of Chriſtianity. So that however corrupted and licentious we may be as individuals in private, yet publicly, and as nations, we are Chriſtians; that is to ſay, when a man's own prejudices and paſſions do not come in the way, he is ſenſible of *the truth*, and of the improvement which the world has received from the Chriſtian Religion, though he may find "a law in his own members warring "againſt this law of his mind." And thus many an idle talker may be much more a Chriſtian than he himſelf ſuſpects; and even thoſe who affect (for there is ſuch affectation) to be conſidered as unbelievers, will find themſelves reſtrained by this Religion in a thouſand inſtances, and their indignation kindled againſt crimes which they would have beheld with indifference, had they not lived among Chriſtians.

The Chriſtian Religion has a firm eſtabliſhment in the world, ſo that the gates of hell cannot prevail againſt it; and if this eſtabliſhment is not general over the world, perhaps it is the intention of Providence to give it but a partial extent at firſt, though the propagation was general, that its good and powerful effects may appear more evident, from its gradually ſubduing the whole world, by the improvement and advantages which thoſe nations ſhould viſibly exhibit who profeſſed it.

It is true, we have the writings of infidels, as a ſort of direct teſtimony, from the reception that they meet with, that we are very far from being all Chriſtians. But when it is conſidered, that

every thing in the material world, and the whole courſe of our education, is contrived to form an opinion of the ſtability and importance of earthly things, it is not to be wondered at that a bad man ſhould be tempted to write againſt Revelation, and that there ſhould be prejudices enough in the world to encourage him to this abuſe of his talents. And yet, if ſuch writings met with a more general reception than they do at preſent, it would be ſo far from proving that we are not Chriſtians, that it ſeems to prove juſt the contrary; and that our Chriſtianity is a yoke which is too heavy for us to bear; which leads us to look every where for ſome decent excuſe to throw it off. Beſides, ſuch writings, inſtead of anſwering the direct intention of the authors, have produced ſomething very different, being perhaps inſtruments, though indirectly, in the hands of Providence, for ſpreading and propagating the goſpel.

Such writings have certainly been the occaſion of a more ſerious examination into the grounds of our faith; and many a one will read an infidel book, who would never think of the Bible, or what it contains; and thus, at leaſt, the ſubject of religion becomes more generally known than, perhaps, it would otherwiſe have been: and if the ſubject is once conſidered at all, there is no man can ſet his mind at eaſe upon a point, which, if he diſcovers any thing, he muſt ſee ſo nearly concerns himſelf, even by the reaſonings of infidels about it. For if we allow their writings the utmoſt force, they prove nothing more than this, that the Chriſtian Religion is neither diſcoverable nor ſupportable by the principles of human ſciences. But this, in my opinion, even if they make it good, is proving very little, or rather, if they

cannot deſtroy the proper foundation of Revelation, is actually proving that it comes from God, and cannot be the work of man.

The world is amuſed with every novelty, and when the writer ſhews to the grammarian, and thoſe of like prejudices, that he has tried to reduce the Chriſtian Religion to a grammatical arrangement, but finds his labour in vain, and no poſſibility of giving rules for every thing advanced in it, and from thence concludes that it is falſe, all thoſe who have made this kind of arrangement their ſtandard of truth, and who, for reaſons beſt known to themſelves, may wiſh to be infidels, may talk very plauſibly as ſuch, though very little to the purpoſe. The mathematician, metaphyſician, and natural philoſopher, may, in like manner, produce their reſpective evidence as a ſtandard, and advance the like *well-founded* objections; all of which may be true, and nothing to the purpoſe. And yet ſuch objections ſerve to amuſe mankind; and, what is better even than amuſement, help to keep a diſagreeable truth out of their ſight.

I am no great admirer of ſcientific conſequences, unleſs when formed into ſyſtems for teaching boys to think accurately, nor do I expect they can ever be carried very far, when confined to the real truth of matter of fact, as I have explained myſelf at large in the laſt book; nevertheleſs I ſhall produce an inſtance, to ſhew that principles which mankind might think very certain, would lead to ſtrange concluſions, if traced to their ſcientific conſequences.

It would, for inſtance, be eaſily granted me, that two lines upon an even ſurface, no matter whether crooked or ſtraight, continually approaching

ing one another, muſt meet ſomewhere, if produced. Where is the man, unſkilled in geometry, who would think of refuſing me this reaſonable principle: and yet, by the aſſiſtance of this principle, I ſhall undertake to overturn almoſt every thing that has been demonſtrated in geometry. But there is no occaſion for the qualification of an *almoſt*: by this principle I deſtroy the properties of the *aſymptotes* of the *hyperbola*, and from them I can eaſily get at the general properties of the *conic ſections*; and by proceeding thus, I can overturn the whole fabric of geometry from its very foundation, and eſtabliſh in its ſtead a ſcientific ſyſtem of abſurdity and nonſenſe, which would be greedily received by the world, if it could help to eaſe mankind of ſuch a reſtraint as the Chriſtian Religion impoſes. Meditate upon this inſtance, ye who are admirers of conſequential reaſonings.

Theſe things are not ſaid from a diſpoſition to undervalue human ſciences; if they can anſwer their own ends, it is all that can be expected from them; and the expecting more from them, ſhews that we are not well acquainted with the nature of them. And perhaps many of the objections to Chriſtianity have derived their force from the attempts that have been made to give it this ſyſtematic teachable form; an objection againſt the ſyſtematic arrangement is conſidered, however improperly, as an objection againſt the thing itſelf.

But ſyſtems are neceſſary evils, ſpringing from the weakneſs of men. We muſt teach, if any thing to the purpoſe, according to ſyſtem, and where there may be improper teachers, the ſyſtem ſhould be preſcribed. Thus it would not be

proper, where any attention was paid to the intereſts of learning, to truſt to men of very poor abilities to form a grammar for their pupils, who might be ſufficiently qualified to teach by a grammar formed by another. But if the ſubject is of general importance, and liable to be miſunderſtood, the teachers and learners ſhould be equally obliged to keep to ſome ſyſtem eſtabliſhed by public authority. Only in the caſe of religion, objections to ſuch a ſyſtem ought never to be conſidered as objections to Chriſtianity; "let God be true, "but every man a liar."

Modern infidelity has ſomething very remarkable in it, and it muſt ſeem a very unaccountable appearance, that the more information mankind have received upon this ſubject of religion, the leſs attention they ſhould pay to it; and eſpecially that in Chriſtian countries, men have dared more openly to ſet themſelves againſt the true God, than the heathens ever did againſt the groſſeſt of their idols. This, to a ſuperficial obſerver, might ſeem, at firſt ſight, to juſtify an opinion, that the world was become more irreligious by the propagation of Chriſtianity, which, by aboliſhing the kingdom of Satan, had even given mankind a more unbounded liberty of indulging their paſſions, than they enjoyed before: but this is ſo far from being the caſe, that the attentive obſerver will find that Chriſtianity has humanized the world; that is, wherever it has been received has made us *men* and brethren.

Man, it is true, is the moſt timorous of all animals, as he has more ſources of fear, than any other ſenſible creature; but by aſſociating into communities, this fear comes to be gradually diminiſhed, for every one has a much greater con-

confidence in another than in himſelf, becauſe we know our own weakneſs better than that of others; and thus by mutual ſupport and confidence, we are able to perform miracles of courage: and as the Chriſtian Religion has deſtroyed thoſe numberleſs ſources of ſuperſtition which the fears of mankind had opened for their own torment, many now are become ſo fool-hardy as to extend this courage to heaven itſelf, not indeed in the impious ſtyle of making war, but by trying to hide themſelves from the ſight of ſuch a perfect being as God, ſeeking for a kind of independence under the ſhelter of the laws of nature.

Though we naturally love perfection, and admire it, yet from a conſciouſneſs of our own weakneſs, folly, and vice, we are very unwilling to put ourſelves under the inſpection and direction of a perfect character. This might be proved from the hiſtory and daily practice of mankind: and this makes the moſt vicious chuſe fate and nature, which are blind, to have dominion over them, rather than God Almighty.

But this important *election* is not left to ourſelves, for God claims his dominion over us, and has given us ſufficient manifeſtations to this purpoſe: and more particularly the Chriſtian Religion is founded upon a kind of evidence which human diſcoveries can never invalidate; and this evidence beſides has an extent and ſtability which the principles of human ſciences cannot beſtow.

CHAP. II.

Of the Origin of the World and of Mankind.

THOSE are but ignorant pretenders to ſcience, who ſet out with conſidering an inquiry into the origin of mankind and of the world, as a philoſophic queſtion: for ſuch a proceeding, inſtead of indicating a turn for diſcovery, rather indicates that kind of weakneſs of mind, which ſhews itſelf by a diſpoſition to work without materials; and is moſt in its element when employed upon ſuch dreams as the ſpeculations about infinity. For all our diſcoveries in the way of natural ſpeculation, tend to nothing elſe, but the making obſervations on the things already formed, and claſſing them either for particular uſes, which we may diſcover experimentally, without knowing any thing of their real natures, or turning the obſervations which we have made to the improvement of our faculties, by giving us a ready means of becoming acquainted with things. We know that fire and air and water are powerful inſtruments in nature, but we know nothing but a few of their effects; and from what we can ſee, we may be pretty certain that they are not inſtruments employed by God for the creation, but only for the preſervation of things; they are agents for ſeparating and compounding things already made, but nothing farther.

If left to ourſelves, we are, therefore, compleatly ſhut out from this important information; and conſequently being able to inveſtigate neither our beginning or end, we muſt be left in a very imperfect

imperfect ſtate, to die like the brutes, or at beſt to ſupport our ſpirits with endleſs conjectures, derived from our natural feelings and apprehenſions.

Thus far, indeed, we may be certain, from our own experience, that neither mankind, nor the other animals, are the ſpontaneous production of the earth, and have reaſon to be firmly convinced, that if all the animals were compleatly extirpated from off the face of the earth, that there are no powers in nature which could repair this loſs. The probable opinion, therefore, would be, that ſome *Being*, equal to the taſk, has performed this great work, and who, as we have certain proofs that he knew when to ſtop, muſt have intelligence, and all other powers ſufficient for ſuch a work; and farther than this conjecture we cannot pretend to go of ourſelves. And we ſhould be in endleſs perplexity when we came to conſider what could be our reaſon for hiding ourſelves from the ſight of a *Being* of infinite perfections. Who told us that we were naked? And whence did this nakedneſs proceed?

But we have a book profeſſing, not in the natural way of human invention, to give a true account of all theſe particulars. It at the ſame time adds many other circumſtances, of which, without this hiſtory, we muſt have remained for ever ignorant. Now in this book it is ſaid, that God created every thing out of nothing, and not from any pre-exiſting materials, nor by the miniſtry of ſecond cauſes, but by the word of his power: and particularly, that he formed man of the duſt of the earth, but that he breathed a ſoul into him, and gave him dominion over all the other animals; and that out of man woman was formed.

Mankind thus made, are then tried, to ſee whether they are really fit for that ſtate of nature which was thus formed: and it appears upon trial, that they were not: they had not their appetites ſufficiently under ſubjection to their reaſon, conſidering the temptations to which they were expoſed. And therefore it ſeemed good to God, that they, and all their poſterity, ſhould be tried in ſome other ſtate before they could be fit for ſuch an exalted rank as was at firſt intended for them. Though it is not ſaid but, by this trial, they may be fitted for a much more glorious ſtate than that in which they were placed at firſt. The hiſtory of the progreſs of mankind, and of the means by which they were to be prepared for this ſtate, is contained in the ſame book; which is propoſed to our conſideration, not as a human compoſition, but is recommended to us as a divine revelation. And its contents are propoſed to us as our rule of conduct, under the ſevereſt penalties in caſe of neglect, either in believing, or in complying with the injunctions and directions given in it.

Undoubtedly the effect which this ought to have upon the mind of every rational and ſerious man, ought at leaſt to be a determination to give ſuch an information a ſerious and rational examination. And certainly the very firſt appearance of the book carries with it a very important air; for the conſideration of its contents, and even a compliance with them, is propoſed to us at our peril. The different writers make no apology for want of information, nor for want of abilities; which, by the bye, is a very ſingular circumſtance, and even without example.

Nor

Nor can we produce any rational excuſe if we neglect this important examination; we cannot pretend to excuſe ourſelves upon a ſuppoſition that we want abilities to judge of this matter; the ſubject is not made up of conſequences derived from an intricate, artificial, ſyſtematic arrangement; but conſiſts of plain matter of fact, level to the capacity of all mankind, and, which is very ſingular, is made up of facts equally intereſting to all mankind, which is a thing that cannot be ſaid of any other collection of facts. Nor is there any occaſion for our cautious and ſuſpicious temper to take the alarm, becauſe we have nothing to guard againſt but the cunning of our fellow-creatures. In ſhort, our ſatisfying ourſelves that this book is no human compoſition, or rather, to ſpeak more accurately, that it contains no human project, is, in fact, proving it to be ſupernatural or divine. Our fellow-creatures, it is true, might be diſpoſed, either from ſelfiſh conſiderations, to impoſe upon us, or merely to divert themſelves with our credulity; nay, all this has been done, and, what makes us maſters of this ſubject, the inſtances are upon record.

CHAP. III.

Of the Nature of this Subject.

BUT this account of the nature and condition of man, if true, is confeſſedly above human invention, and therefore, in a certain ſenſe, is above human comprehenſion; and is beſides a ſubject of ſuch a nature as no man, even if it had accidentally come into his head, was likely to propoſe

propoſe for the deluſion of his fellow-creatures, as the ſcheme has nothing human in its end or manner. For if the things related be taken for facts, their evidence reſts entirely in faith, or in a belief of the things related upon the authority and teſtimony of this book, and that in a particular ſenſe, as the facts can have no collateral ſupport, becauſe of their ſingularity, nor do they admit of experimental proof, becauſe they can never be repeated, neither can their proof be ſought for nor examined by the principles of ſcience. And all theſe are ſtrong marks of a ſupernatural original. For if the things followed one another, according to the common courſe of human events, or might be deduced regularly and conſequentially, like ſcientific inferences, there ſeems no great difficulty in conceiving, that they are the inventions of men; becauſe this implies ſuch a natural connection, that whoever luckily got into the train of thinking, might have proſecuted the ſubject: for human nature has produced many inſtances to this purpoſe. So that to ſuch as think with me, a conſequential, conſiſtent ſcheme of religion, all perfectly intelligible, and containing no difficulty, would be a very ſuſpicious thing, whatever might be its merits in other reſpects.

But on the other hand, nonſenſe is perfectly unintelligible, and incapable of being reduced to any ſcientific arrangement: and haſty reaſoners are always for reducing, under this head of *nonſenſe*, whatever they cannot thus arrange. And to the majority of mankind, Newton's *Principia* is the moſt nonſenſical book in the world, except perhaps the Bible.

It may be ſaid, muſt religion be irrational? Is there no way by which ſupernatural knowledge

can

can be conveyed to mankind, agreeable to the principles of reaſon? If this queſtion means, Is there no way of inferring the whole of Revelation from ſimple and ſettled principles within the reach of the human capacity; I affirm, that if there were any ſuch, I ſhould no longer conſider it as a Revelation, but as a human diſcovery or plan, however ingenious I might allow that plan to be: becauſe, whatever one man can fully comprehend, I can conceive no difficulty in ſuppoſing another to invent. But if by this queſtion be meant, Does this ſubject admit of rational evidence; that is, ſuch an evidence as a man ought to found his conviction upon? In my opinion it has ſtronger evidence than any ſubject with which I am acquainted, though not ſo formal as many others. But as it is not a philoſophic ſcheme, this want of formality of evidence is immaterial: and it is only neceſſary to prove that it is a ſcheme, or in other words, as it is not ſuſpected of worldly wiſdom by our reaſoners againſt it, we have only to clear it of the imputation of worldly folly.

It is true, all the facts taken ſingly, that is, if there were but one ſingle fact muſt be incredible, and if either of them were to be propoſed ſingly to mankind, every wiſe man ought to conſider it as an impoſition, unleſs where he was an eye-witneſs: for the nature of man is ſuch, that he can propagate a ſingle lie, however bold; but its want of connection with any thing elſe, diſcovers the falſhood, and it is but making a right uſe of our reaſon, to receive every ſuch ſtory with ſuſpicion. Beſides, if the facts were credible of themſelves ſingly, they would no longer have a right to be conſidered as ſupernatural, and yet, taken all together, they may be conſidered as capable of producing

ducing the moſt rational conviction: the not attending to this, ſeems to me to be one of the great cauſes of infidelity.

The ſchemes of mankind we may be perfectly acquainted with, and can very poſitively ſpeak to the motives of them; and may beſides, with a very little pains, be well enough informed to calculate the duration of them, and form an opinion, from the very beginning, of what will probably be their end.

But more particularly, there is no ſcheme of human contrivance, but, when all the facts are laid before us, we can account for the motives of the actors, and the progreſs of the ſcheme. And one very remarkable circumſtance attends all human ſchemes, that they are limited to a very ſmall portion of time, many of them only the lie of a day, to anſwer a particular and preſſing purpoſe: and all of them diſcover the eagerneſs of the contriver to bring them to perfection, by forcing as much as poſſible of them into view, to engage adherents by the plauſibility of the projects: and we always obſerve ſtrong marks of a diſpoſition to catch at the fruit of them, joined to an anxiety about the favour and good opinion of the world. The plans of the moſt cunning *artiſts* are very plauſible upon the firſt appearance, and carry an air of public-ſpiritedneſs along with them: yet, however artfully the contrivers may endeavour to conceal their motives, we always find ſomething ſelfiſh at the bottom.

And another peculiarity of ſuch ſchemes is, that if they are not brought to ſome perfection by the firſt planners of them, we ſhall probably hear nothing more of them. If a deſire of dominion, or even of reputation of any kind, ſpur on

on a man to make an attempt to diſtinguiſh himſelf, we naturally expect even from the wiſeſt (or rather, if he acted otherwiſe, we ſhould be apt to conſider him as fooliſh) a prudent haſte to bring his ſchemes to perfection, but particularly an unwillingneſs to deliver up the execution of them to another, when they were in a manner brought to perfection; but eſpecially in the diſpoſing of the advantages of them, we ſhould look upon him as unnatural if he did not diſcover a ſtrong partiality to his own family and deſcendants. There is a certain ſelfiſh vanity attending man, which contracts his ſentiments, and of courſe contracts all his ſchemes; inſtead of the citizen of the world, and the general benefactor of mankind, you diſcover a creature graſping at every thing, and confining his acquiſitions to the gratification of a vanity which is to ſeparate him from the reſt of the world.

Theſe are prejudices, but they are human nature; and what is more, in our preſent imperfect ſtate, they are the very principles by which human ſocieties ſubſiſt, and are kept together and improved.

CHAP. IV.

Of the Hiſtory of the Jews.

THIS hiſtory begins with a ſhort and ſimple account of a thing far out of the reach of all philoſophical inveſtigation; namely, the hiſtory of the origin of all things, and particularly of man, with the account of a diſorder very ſoon introduced

troduced into this lower world by the ungovernable paſſions of mankind.

As the inhabitants had now no longer faculties ſuited to the world in which they were placed, the face of nature is made to undergo a change, that it may be fitted for their changed circumſtances. There is, therefore, according to this account, no veſtige left of what man himſelf or the world was, before the fall: and for this reaſon, there is great propriety in juſt telling us, that ſuch a change was brought about by ſomething of which we have now no means left to enable us to form any judgement; the only things by which we could have meaſured the truth or falſhood, or if this be too preſumptuous, by which we could comprehend what then happened, being vaniſhed and gone. And therefore the moſt regular and minute deſcription would convey juſt as much knowledge to us, as a diſſertation on colours to one born blind. It was a ſpecies of intemperance; and to this day mankind diſcover their depravity by nothing ſo ſoon or ſo naturally, as by intemperance in eating and drinking, with its conſequences.

But if a mere human writer had invented this ſtory, how would he have taken advantage of this very circumſtance, to embeliſh it with all the ornaments of fiction, to raiſe the wonder and admiration of men; or if he had received it as a tradition, there was ſtill great room for invention, and he could have added much of his own to extend his reputation; and, if he had been able, he would have given it ſomething of a philoſophic air, in order to ſuit it to the taſte of the reaſoning part of mankind.

By

By this hiſtory, however, it appears, that the world was left in a ſtate rather favourable to mankind; and it ſeems the ground was not ſo compleatly curſed, but that they had the means of corrupting themſelves to an intolerable degree; which there is ſome reaſon to think was left ſo to prove experimentally the impropriety and inconſiſtency of ſuch faculties with ſuch circumſtances; for before the flood, mankind had become entirely ſenſual: God, therefore, by a *deluge*, deſtroys the old world, and produces a new face of things, the paſſions and faculties of mankind being better adapted to the ſtate of nature which was then produced. And this is the only one of which we are capable of judging, being that which remains to this day, with only the changes which mankind themſelves have made.

After the deluge, mankind are diſperſed by a confuſion of languages introduced among them; and after this we find them left to the uſe of their own faculties, which have to ſtruggle with the laws of nature, in the form of climate, ſoil, and the ungovernable nature of ſome materials which they had occaſion to uſe, according to their deſires and ſituation; but their chief ſtruggle has been againſt the effects of their own unruly paſſions, and thoſe of their fellow-creatures.

Only we find that God takes under his immediate protection one ſingle family, and their deſcendents. But this choice, it is clear, does not proceed from partiality, but is made the means of carrying on his plan for the inſtruction and improvement of the world; which reformation is all along conducted in ſuch a manner, that men may put in of their own as much as poſſible, and

make the work, in ſome meaſure, appear to be their own.

It is true, we find great encomiums upon the character of that man of whom God made choice; but this ſays no more than that it ſuited the ſcheme of God better to make uſe of a man naturally diſpoſed for ſuch a work, than to diſpoſe one ſupernaturally for it. Becauſe if that had been done, he could not, with any propriety, have been propoſed as an example to future generations, which is very reaſonably done, as the caſe ſtands at preſent.

The nations which were ſcattered over the face of the earth, may be conſidered juſt as much under the guidance of the Supreme Being, as the nation of the Jews; and when we think otherwiſe, it is not an eſſential, but a relative conſideration which determines us to ſuch an opinion.

The growth of the nation of the Jews, amidſt an oppreſſion which ought to deſtroy them; the manner of gathering them together; the circumſtances would make them leave the moſt fertile country in the world; their march through the ſea; the forty years that they wandered in the wilderneſs; and their ſettlement afterwards in Canaan, exhibit one continued ſcene of miraculous power. And during this ſpace of time, there were ſuch diviſions among them, as would have ſhewn themſelves ſooner in the detection of any ſupernatural pretences, than in the manner that they did: for Korah and his company would have then found a much better objection againſt Moſes and Aaron, than that they *took too much upon them.*

After their ſettlement they are left more to themſelves, and the ſupernatural interpoſitions are only

only occaſional. They are carried away captive into other nations; ſometimes aſſiſted, and ſometimes forſaken of God: and the nearer the days of the Meſſiah approach, the more they are reduced to the ſtate of the reſt of the world.

CHAP. V.

Remarks upon this Hiſtory.

THE Jews, their opinions, and hiſtory, were matters of wonder and curious ſpeculation to the antients; but as they had not the true principles, their reaſonings about them are extremely abſurd.

And it muſt be acknowledged, that if the whole body of the Jews had vaniſhed with the ten tribes, or, like other nations, had left no traces behind them, by which they could be diſtinguiſhed, the books of Moſes would have been a very unaccountable compoſition; and even if the hiſtorical facts had been too well authenticated to be denied, there muſt have appeared an extravagant waſte of ſupernatural power for any viſible effect which it had produced.

For, ſpeaking according to the principles of the reſt of mankind, they could never be a happy people, as they were continually in unnatural circumſtances; not being allowed to act upon the motives which commonly influence the actions of men, or even often to indulge ſuch paſſions as are reckoned innocent and natural: and theſe reſtraints were not political or partial, for the whole nation was bound by them from the higheſt to the loweſt. For even Moſes himſelf does nothing of importance

from the common feelings of humanity: he has no views of aggrandizing himſelf or his family; nor even of finiſhing the ſcheme which he himſelf had been ſo long engaged in; which, in a certain ſenſe, he had begun, and ſaw to be ſo near its concluſion: the final execution of it, however, he gives over to another; not in a fit of deſpair, or during a time of danger, but deliberately and coolly: and this other perſon, to whom he delivers up his commiſſion, is ſo far from being a near relation of his own, that he is not even of the ſame tribe: ſo that Moſes himſelf ſeems perfectly to have underſtood his own character and commiſſion, which was this, that he was able to do nothing of himſelf; or rather, that he had nothing to do of himſelf, it being no ſcheme or plan of his, but one, as it were, at firſt forced upon him.

This is a very conſiſtent character, according to our belief of this hiſtory, but would be an abſurd and inconceivable one, according to the ſuppoſition which makes the ſcheme his own contrivance; and of courſe the ſupernatural powers pretended on purpoſe to delude the credulous multitude into a compliance with his views; if that could be called, in any ſenſe, his views, from which he was to derive no advantage, either real or imaginary, as mankind conſider advantages. If this be the truth, Moſes would have certainly been the moſt extraordinary impoſtor that can be conceived, not only on account of the ends which he propoſed to himſelf, and the means he made uſe of, but alſo from the circumſtances in which he choſe to exhibit his impoſitions. To make choice of the court of a powerful monarch to perform in; and this choice not directed by ſuch

motives

motives as might be expected from the ſcene of action; for, in ſuch circumſtances, an impoſtor would certainly, at leaſt naturally, have paid his court to the prince, inſtead of threatening him. And what had he to threaten him with as a mere human agent? The action would have been that of a madman.

It would have been a very bad piece of policy in Moſes, if this had been a ſcheme of human policy, to harden Pharaoh's heart by the ſtumbling-block which is thrown in his way, and which has ever ſince ſtood in the way of infidels, in beginning his ſupernatural exertions, with thoſe very things which the king's ſubjects could imitate by ſlight of hand, with ſufficient dexterity to deceive the multitude. But God, who has inexhauſtible ſources of power, might act thus with great propriety, and gradually clear the ſight of the Ægyptians, and open their eyes to diſtinguiſh a true miracle; for the jugler's art conſiſts in taking people by ſurprize, before they have had time to fix their attention.

But ſuppoſing all the difficulties in Ægypt overcome, (which could not have been very eaſy for an impoſtor, where the kind of impoſition that he muſt uſe was brought to ſuch perfection) and even the red ſea paſſed; a wilderneſs of ſcorching ſands would have been a ſtrange place to chuſe for exhibiting acts of leger-de-main to a hungry, thirſty, diſappointed, enraged and obſtinate multitude. And all this while, this very artful impoſtor, running all this hazard, and diſcovering no ſigns of any paſſion that he had to gratify, except he had been a monſter of ingratitude, and did all this in return for the preſervation of his

life, and the advantage of an education at the court of Ægypt.

But the infidels alledge, that the whole hiſtory is improbable. They ſhould explain particularly what they mean by improbable: ſurely they would not bring down things profeſſedly ſupernatural to a natural ſtandard: if this could be done with the preſent ſubject, its credit would be entirely deſtroyed. The hiſtory has every mark of authenticity that the nature of the ſubject admits. We meet with none of the common, nay, general prejudices of mankind here. There is no boaſting of ſupernatural deſcents, in the manner of the heathens. All mankind have juſtice done them in being derived from one common ſtock, as they enjoy one common nature. We here find no attempts to palliate or conceal the defects of the people of the Jews; nay, their vices are related with a plainneſs and faithfulneſs which have given ſcandal to ſome well-meaning people, as they think ſome of them improper to be told, much more to be committed by a people ſo highly favoured of heaven.

But theſe very circumſtances anſwer a good purpoſe, and are even neceſſary to enable us to make a proper eſtimate of the character of this people, which we would be very apt to miſtake from their poſſeſſing ſuch extraordinary privileges and gifts, by ſhewing us more evidently that they were only inſtruments for a particular purpoſe; and, in all other reſpects mere men, and in many inſtances very bad men.

The interpoſitions of God have ſomething ſingularly characteriſtic; the heathen gods act entirely upon human ideas; which ſhews that they have no real exiſtence, but are only notions bred in

in human imaginations; and in the buſineſs of the world, they ſupport only a ſecondary part, being introduced to aſſiſt or elevate ſome favourite character; they have nothing to do on their own account, but are for ever impertinently interfering in human affairs. In the fables of the heathens, the gods are the *machines*, but it is men that act this part in the ſcheme of revelation.

The hiſtory of our redemption, to be read to the purpoſe, muſt be read with a diſpoſition to learn, and not with a diſpoſition to cavil and criticiſe. A human compoſition we may think we have ſome right to criticiſe, and to judge of the probability or truth of the things contained in it. But a revelation, which claims an authority more than human, and aſſumes a dignity, which ſhews that it does not court the approbation of men, but demands their attention at their peril, ought to be received in a different manner, and its pretenſions muſt be examined by a very different ſtandard from human criticiſm. Juſt as in the material world, where we muſt content ourſelves with ſuch a knowledge as is ſuited to our circumſtances, without pretending to ſay, that the crooked ſhould have been made ſtraight, we muſt content ourſelves with alledging, that it will anſwer our purpoſe as well to reaſon upon a ſuppoſition that it is ſtraight; not that this is better in the nature of things, but becauſe this ſimplicity is better ſuited to our faculties. And as this is what we are neceſſarily led to in examining natural appearances, even where we have the moſt accurate meaſures that human ingenuity can invent; ſo our wiſeſt and moſt prudential ſcheme will be to underſtand the Bible with the ſame allowances and limitations, and as nearly as we can according to the plan and

level of the human underſtanding, as beſt anſwering our purpoſes, and ſuiting our weakneſſes; making uſe of our *natural* underſtanding as the means of coming at a rational knowledge of the ſubject, but watching with caution againſt the intruſion of our *artificial* underſtanding, which will be forcing itſelf upon us as an inſtrument of criticiſm; rather concluding that the difficulties here may be thrown in our way on purpoſe as a trial of our faith, and an exerciſe of our abilities; or perhaps as a teſt, to prove that we are of the proper teachable diſpoſition, which is not conſiſtent with a conceit of knowledge.

If it ſhould be ſaid, how do we know, or how can we be certain that events are ſupernatural, if we do not uſe the utmoſt freedom in examining them, approving or rejecting them according as we find them to be worthy or unworthy of God? This is, no doubt, very flattering, and very plauſible; but I ſhould be glad to know where this teſt is to be found, by which we can determine what is worthy or unworthy of God. Are our faculties ſufficient for this inquiry? I think they are the fartheſt from it poſſible: and though human reaſon has been acting the plagiary, and borrowing from Revelation ever ſince the propagation of Chriſtianity, yet it has diſcovered nothing but its own inſufficiency. There is then no remedy but implicit faith, if our faculties be found inſufficient for the taſk. Certainly there is; we may uſe our reaſon to very good purpoſe upon this ſubject: for though we do not know the power and councils of God, any farther than he chuſes to diſcover them to us, yet it is very poſſible for us to make ourſelves pretty well acquainted with the powers and councils of men; and may thus come by

by a proper and modeſt uſe of our reaſon, to form a very ſatisfactory concluſion where human impoſitions are concerned; for the whole diſpute here is, whether this work be of God or man. But it will be neceſſary to inquire a little more particucularly into the evidence proper upon ſuch a ſubject.

CHAP. VI.

A farther Conſideration of the Kind of Evidence proper for this Subject.

THE Chriſtian Religion can neither be refuted nor defended upon the principles of thoſe narrow ſyſtems formed and ſhaped to the human faculties, which have been contrived to improve the underſtanding, by giving a regularity and order to our thoughts, and to curb the extravagant flights of the imagination, which would otherwiſe throw the affairs of this world into confuſion and diſorder.

I have explained, in the laſt book, the ends to be anſwered by ſuch ſyſtems, and the prejudices which they are likely to produce. But they all lead to a general prejudice againſt revelation, as their very end is to make men content with this world; beſides a revelation comes in the ſuſpicious form of a work of imagination, and can expect no juſtice, where ſcientific arrangement is to judge. So that we muſt have recourſe to a different tribunal, if we would chuſe to be informed of the truth; and whoever would lay a firm foundation for his faith, or even for his infidelity, muſt conduct himſelf upon a more extenſive plan; and get

into the wide world of things, and not confine his views within the little circle made by human ſcience.

Even the man who begins the ſtudy of geometry, will find that he muſt proceed upon very different principles from thoſe according to which he had acquired his grammatical knowledge. Or if he perſiſted in his error, the world would hardly compliment him ſo far as to believe that the geometrical concluſions were falſe, becauſe they did not fall in with his prejudices; but they would rather ſuppoſe that he wanted a capacity or diſpoſition for attending to the proper evidence.

Here is a ſcheme of religion laid before us; the queſtion is not, Is it formed according to, and derived from what we call philoſophical principles? But is this ſcheme a human contrivance? Is it a plan of human artifice and cunning? Or is it an inſtance of human extravagance and folly? The man who ſets about this examination, ſhould forget that he is a grammarian, mathematician, or natural philoſopher, and only endeavour to keep up the character of a reaſonable creature.

If the Chriſtian Revelation be of human contrivance, it is a very extraordinary ſcheme indeed. The life of man, nor the life of families, and, I may add, nor even the life of nations, is equal to an impoſition of this kind, even were it calculated to gratify the higheſt pitch of vanity of which the human heart is ſuſceptible. This plan begins in the obſcureſt manner, conſiſting at firſt only of promiſes very remote and perfectly unintelligible, humanly ſpeaking, by thoſe to whom they were addreſſed. The ſame plan is carried on, and is continually improving, and gradually unfolding itſelf for a ſpace of between five and ſix thouſand years,

years, according to the teſtimony of the book which explains it; and for the ſpace of three thouſand, according to collateral teſtimony. But what is very wonderful, the different improvements do not follow conſequentially or naturally, but are brought about by means and inſtruments totally inadequate to the purpoſe, as men ſpeak and judge when they form their opinions upon the ſoundeſt reaſonings and moſt accurate experience.

Beſides, it promotes the deſigns of no particular men or families or nations; but takes in impartially the whole human race; and treats mankind according to their real nature, and not according to the fanciful diſtinctions of human vanity; always ſpeaking to them from beginning to end in a ſtyle of authority, and, in a certain ſenſe, in a ſtyle of contempt and pity.

Even the people to whom this ſcheme is firſt opened, and who are the oſtenſible inſtruments for carrying it on, have only faint and obſcure hints given them, and ſuch as they might ſet their imaginations to work upon, but could not comprehend. The Jews ſeem rather to be called to bear teſtimony to a plan that is going forward, than to be any way intereſted in its progreſs: for when it was more fully laid open, they even thought it their intereſt to ſtop it: here they make an effort of themſelves, violent indeed, but ineffectual.

And the little that the prophets themſelves underſtood of the matter, appears from what our Saviour himſelf ſays of John the Baptiſt, whom he declares to be equal to any of the prophets, but more ignorant of this ſcheme than the leaſt informed Chriſtian.

Man-

Mankind, however, cannot be made mere machines; and the Jews, though they underſtood nothing of the real plan, formed one to themſelves. Men, in ſuch circumſtances, being confined to certain proſpects, would be apt to draw matter of pride and conſolation from them, right or wrong, whether they underſtood them or not. A people particularly choſen by God would be apt to be inſolent, without conſidering the purpoſe for which they were choſen. And this we find was actually the caſe with the Jews, who from ſuch a prepoſſeſſion, miſunderſtood the whole plan, applying every thing to the gratification of their own vanity, by concluding that this ſcheme, myſterious as it was, foreboded nothing but the gratifying of their ambition in the perſons of their deſcendants. And perhaps this miſconception was neceſſary to make them act their part in this buſineſs with propriety, and in a natural manner, but it certainly proves that they were mere inſtruments in conducting it. And their example ought to be a leſſon to us againſt the dangerous conſequences of ſuch prejudices as ſpring from a conceit of our importance, when we think that we are diſtinguiſhed, or have diſtinguiſhed ourſelves from the bulk of mankind. For ſuch prejudices are generally ſo powerful, as to reſiſt every kind of evidence, and to deſtroy the teachable diſpoſition in mankind, which was what happened to the Jews. And this is particularly dangerous upon the preſent ſubject; for God never condeſcends to accommodate his diſpenſations to the conceit and and pride of particular men.

Now, let me aſk any one, who conſiders this plan as an impoſition upon mankind; Who is carrying it on? It cannot be the Jews, for they know

know nothing of the matter; and when the ſtrength of its evidence awaked them from their ambitious dream, they ſet themſelves violently to oppoſe it.

It may, however, be pretended, that ſchemes have extended themſelves by natural means, and have received gradual improvements from one age to another, without any intention to bring them to what they have accidentally arrived; the improvements being only the natural conſequence of the operations of the faculties of men in certain circumſtances. This, for inſtance, is generally the caſe with the improvements in ſcience: and why, it may be ſaid, may not religion have proceeded and improved by the ſame means?

But we muſt obſerve, that the moſt intricate ſciences appear no longer myſterious after they are diſcovered: And this is ſo much a truth, that we can hardly conceive a perſon, with a proper uſe of his faculties, and theſe properly prepared, to have been in the ſame circumſtances, and in the ſame train of thinking, without making the ſame diſcovery. And all mankind, who are capable of underſtanding any diſcoveries in ſcience, may be conceived in circumſtances which would infallibly have led them to make the diſcoveries themſelves. Every one who knows any thing of arts and ſciences, muſt feel himſelf ſo much at his eaſe upon ſuch ſubjects, that he would never think of referring the diſcovery of them to a ſupernatural power. Beſides, the firſt ſteps in any ſcience are perfectly clear and intelligible, and always the eaſieſt to be underſtood; they are only deficient in extent and *generality*.

But this is ſo far from being the caſe with our religion, that it is all darkneſs till we come to the

the times of our Saviour; and if he had never come, the whole would have been nothing: but this is not the caſe with human improvements and projects; they are always ſomething, as far as they go; and the ſuppoſing them to ſtop at any part, will exhibit a certain degree of perfection, and afford a leſſon to mankind either of what they are to follow or ſhun. But if the Chriſtian ſcheme had ſtopt ſhort, no uſe could have been made of it by man; for there is no probability that any body would think of threatening and terrifying a king by plagues and miracles, and then proceed to carry off the moſt laborious of his ſubjects, leading them through an arm of the ſea, and keeping them forty years in a wilderneſs to be fed and cloathed miraculouſly. In ſhort, mankind can neither imitate, nor apply to any worldly purpoſe, any part of this plan.

It has been ſaid, though by very weak people indeed, that the whole is a fiction, reſembling the extravagance of romance: but it has produced too many conſequences in the world to allow any one to dwell a moment upon ſuch a ſuppoſition: and what is immediately to our purpoſe, we have ample proof of what mankind have been able to do upon religious ſubjects, when left to themſelves, and to their own inventions; and by the ſpecimens that they have given us, we ſee that their inventions are poor indeed.

Romances are always the invention of one head, and the actors are obviouſly imaginary *beings*, adorned with an appearance of ſupernatural power, and yet employed in nothing but bringing about human events in a very unnatural manner. But in the Bible, ſupernatural events are brought about by the inſtrumentality of mere men; and even the part that our Saviour himſelf has to tranſact,

act, he performs in the perſon of a man. The nature of fabulous compoſitions is ſo well underſtood, that it may be reduced to rules: And I can form as determinate a judgement upon reading a romance, as when I examine the ſolution of an algebraic problem.

Does any body believe in the exiſtence of the actors in fables? Does any one doubt of the exiſtence of the nation of the Jews; or of the exiſtence of the Chriſtians, who have been the inſtruments in conducting this plan ſince it was taken out of their hands? Believe as little as you pleaſe upon this ſubject; no man of common ſenſe can help believing ſo much as will ſupport the opinion that a plan has been carrying on. And although it be conducted according to the principles of no human ſciences or compoſitions, this is no argument of its want of proof, but only conveys to us this neceſſary information, that we muſt become as *little children*, laying aſide our ſcientific prejudices, which tend to deſtroy the teachable diſpoſition in us, and prepare ourſelves for learning a new ſcience founded upon new evidence.

CHAP. VII.

Of the Nature of this Plan.

WHEN we diſcover a ſcheme begun in the remoteſt ages, and which has been every day opening and enlarging itſelf, not according to the plan of human diſcoveries, but by methods ſingular and impoſſible to human ingenuity to contrive, or rather, which in human hands would have produced no effect, it becomes abſolutely neceſſary

neceſſary to go beyond this world for the author and conductor of ſuch a work.

Even the human agents who have their parts to act in it, do not engage in them like men proſecuting their own views, but they have ſomething of an appearance of being forced into the ſervice, or at leaſt like a man waiting for, and acting by, the direction of a maſter: ſo much does every thing put on a ſupernatural air.

Such a ſcheme would be worthy of the attention of a philoſopher in the higheſt degree, as a matter of mere curioſity. But when it is of the moſt intereſting nature to man, as ſetting life and death before him in the higheſt ſenſe of thoſe words, this ſcheme ought to be conſidered, in a certain ſenſe, as every thing: and if the book does really unfold it, all other circumſtances are to be ſet aſide: criticiſms founded upon our ſyſtematic modes of arrangement, or upon our forms of expreſſion, are trifling and impertinent, ſpeaking with no more reverence than we do of human compoſitions. But when we conſider ourſelves and the ſubject, and the author of the plan, ſuch a conduct is to the laſt degree hazardous and abſurd and impious *.

The natural world is a ſcheme or ſyſtem of which we may comprehend enough to anſwer our

* Even a man of abilities may ſpeak with contempt of the impertinent criticiſms made upon his works by a weak man: thus there ſeems no impropriety in Monteſquieu's ſaying, "A l'égard du plan que le petit miniſtre de Wittemberg voudroit que j'euſſe ſuivi dans un ouvrage qui porte le titre d'*Eſprit des lois* repondez-lui que mon intention a été de faire mon ouvrage, et non pas le ſien." But language cannot convey the contempt that any man deſerves who would pretend to direct God Almighty.

neceſſary

neceſſary purpoſes, beſides furniſhing matter to exerciſe our reaſon and ingenuity upon. Yet when we would attempt to comprehend every thing, we ſoon meet with ſuch difficulties as ought to make us ſenſible of our ſhort-ſightedneſs. But inſtead of learning ſuch an uſeful leſſon, the Theoriſt is diſpoſed to conſider whatever occaſions ſuch difficulties, as foreign to the purpoſe, and would have been much better pleaſed with a world formed according to ſome hypotheſis of his own.

In the ſame manner our theoretical moraliſts, pretend to find inſurmountable difficulties in the Bible, much matter that will not fall in with their ſchemes, and therefore, as they pretend, foreign to the purpoſe; much of the ſtyle and arrangement not reducible to the generally received modes of compoſition, and therefore abſurd.

But the courſe of nature, and the courſe of religion, keep on their ſtated progreſs; and with an awful indifference ſeem to be telling ſuch objectors, that it is the intention of God to execute his own plan, and not theirs.

We are taught by God that he made mankind and every thing elſe, not by laws, or according to any eſtabliſhed neceſſary courſe of things: that is, there was nothing done at that time, which, if it were done again, we have any reaſon to think would produce the ſame effect by way of natural conſequence. Laws of nature, then, are poſterior to the creation, and conſequently depending upon the will of God. But mankind always proceed upon the abſurd ſuppoſition, that the laws which preſerve things in being, made them at firſt, which ſhews that the idea of a creation is not a human idea. Man, and we have no reaſon to think otherwiſe of the whole animal creation, was formed

contrary

contrary to the laws of nature; inſtead of a gradual progreſs from infancy to maturity, he is made perfect at once. After this, the laws of nature commence: that is, inſtead of a ſucceſſion of continually varying objects; things either remain invariably the ſame, or generations of men, plants, and animals, ſucceed each other according to a ſtated rule; or, after a time, the ſame objects are exhibited again in the ſame circumſtances. All theſe appearances form habits in us. And upon theſe, taken in the moſt extenſive ſenſe, all our improvement, as rational creatures, depends. But ſome people are ſo abſurd as to think that our very mind depends upon them, and is only a compoſition of ſuch habits. What a human mind would be without the knowledge that it receives from ſenſation and reflection, it is impoſſible for us to ſay, though it ſeems but reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that the knowledge which we are capable of acquiring at preſent depends upon the will of God, and is not a neceſſary conſequence of any laws of nature. The Scripture makes the formation of the ſoul and body two diſtinct acts of God, and the compoſition of which they are made, two diſtinct ſubſtances; the one is called the duſt of the earth, the other the breath of God.

But to quicken our attention to the laws of nature, which God had eſtabliſhed, and haſten our improvement, we are put into a ſtate of trial and temptation; things may be properly uſed or abuſed by us; pleaſure and pain are annexed to the application of certain things, often not immediate but conſequential, and in ſome diſtant period of time, on purpoſe to engage us to look forward into futurity.

What the firſt laws of nature were with reſpect to man, is not ſaid in the Bible, only it appears, upon trial, that human nature, even in its perfect ſtate, was not equal to the temptations to which it might be expoſed, and a particular event ſeemed to have compleated the ruin of mankind; and, if left to themſelves, they muſt have gone on propagating a race naturally devoted to eternal damnation; which ſtate the Scripture, as it calls natural death ſleep, calls eternal death.

Inſtead of creating a new race of men, who might ſtand in need of no reformation, God makes, as it were, a new creation with regard to man, curſes the ground, and thus begins the reformation of the race, which had degenerated; and this reformation will undoubtedly be carried on and compleated in a way which, in the end, will ſet his power, wiſdom, and goodneſs in the ſtrongeſt light that man, or perhaps angels, can behold them.

His plan, as we may collect it from what he has been pleaſed to diſcover, ſeems to be this; to make mankind as much as poſſible the inſtruments of their own reformation, only helping them on, where it was impoſſible for them to do without help. Thus condeſcending to be the teacher of mankind, and ſuiting his leſſons to their capacities, faculties, and circumſtances, as a ſchoolmaſter would try and exerciſe and improve the capacities and faculties of his ſcholars. And to keep to the ſame figure, if I were to teach a boy ſomething directly, which I knew his abilities could not reach of themſelves; but with regard to another, only put him into circumſtances, where he could not fail to learn of himſelf what he wanted, if he made the proper uſe of his faculties;

ties; the firſt would conſider himſelf as obliged to me for his inſtruction; whereas the ſecond would aſcribe the knowledge which he had acquired entirely to himſelf.

In the ſame manner God is condeſcending to teach us in two different ways; in the natural, he has put fixed laws before us, which we may examine; and improve by the examination, if we attend to their regular and ſtated conſequences; and theſe are well proportioned to the length of our lives. If the annual courſe of the ſun had only been an hundred times as great as at preſent, no man could have experienced the variety of the four ſeaſons.

On the other hand, in the ſupernatural world God has condeſcended to diſcover to us what, of ourſelves, we never could have found out; however, not in ſuch a manner as to encourage our indolence, but encumbered with ſuch difficulties as require a very conſiderable, and, at the ſame time, a very prudent exertion of our faculties, to turn to proper account.

Even the matters of fact are myſterious; they do not follow ſtated laws, like thoſe to which ſuch events as are proportioned to the life and faculties of man are ſubject. The life of the world is only the regular period of them; ſo that new worlds, like new years, muſt paſs away, before any principles for eſtabliſhing laws could be found; and therefore our conviction cannot, upon ſuch ſubjects, be grounded in habit, but in faith.

In the material world, the regular returns of certain appearances, that are variable to a certain degree, and the qualities and properties of matter being fixed, all theſe form very ſtrong habits; their frequent appearance, and the conſtant opportunities

tunities which we have of examining them, wear off all air of myſtery in natural things, and a familiarity with them we miſtake for an acquaintance with their natures: and although we ſee only the conſtant effects and regular appearances, yet we find this a knowledge that gives us great ſatisfaction, and we are apt to conclude, that the foundation of ſuch appearances is immoveable, though we cannot tell what it is. And thoſe who confine their views to this world, labour only to make their circumſtances and expectations conſiſtent with each other.

But, on the other hand, though the things in the ſpiritual world are no more myſterious than in the material, yet no habits of this kind can be formed; we have only a ſucceſſion of appearances, all different, and which we are only told tend to a very remote, though a very important end: and how they are means to bring about that end, we cannot tell; and therefore the myſterious air can never forſake even the matters of fact, and we have nothing for it, but to put an entire faith and confidence in God, not that he is carrying on ſuch a ſcheme, for we have ſufficient natural evidence for that, but that he will bring it to perfection in the way which he has promiſed, and that we ourſelves are as much intereſted in it, as it is ſaid in the Bible that we are; and as the event can only give us the natural conviction upon theſe points, their evidence muſt, at preſent, be the evidence of faith.

Yet even this ſpiritual plan, is made as level as poſſible, at leaſt as level as neceſſary to our capacities, by being, in a great meaſure, put into the hands of human actors; and brought forward, not ſilently and ſuddenly, ſo as to eſcape our obſerva-

vation, but with ſuch a gradual oppoſition from worldly-minded men, as could not retard its progreſs, yet was ſufficient to draw the attention of mankind, and keep them ſenſible that ſuch a ſcheme was going forward.

And for this purpoſe, it firſt of all pleaſed God to make the two grand diviſions of the world into Jew and Gentile: and though the Jews ſeem more immediately under the protection of God, yet we have no reaſon to look upon the heathen part as neglected; and a man would judge very erroneouſly, who ſhould aſcribe God's dealings with the Jews to partiality, or to think that this conduct exhibited him in the character of a reſpecter of perſons. For, upon a nearer inſpection, it will be found that God does not ſo properly protect the Jews as his own ſcheme; becauſe the ſeparation of the Jews from the reſt of the world, was not intended as the means of making them a flouriſhing nation, but only to preſerve the worſhip of the true God, and proper notions of his attributes, and to be ſuch a proof as all mankind could comprehend, that God was carrying on this plan of religion; at the ſame time that the reſt of the world, in all variety of circumſtances, were to exhibit what human nature is of itſelf, and what it is *capable* of doing, and *able* to do, when left to itſelf. And thus, by a compariſon of all circumſtances, the rational and teachable part of the world, in the fulneſs of time would be able to ground their faith upon the ſoundeſt reaſonings.

This view of the ſubject accounts very fully for God's ſuffering the greateſt part of mankind, for ſo long a time, *to walk after their own ways*; and it will alſo have a tendency to moderate the very high opinion which we are apt to form of ſuper-

ſupernatural endowments, by making us put a value upon them according to the circumſtances of the man who receives them, and not according to the excellence of the endowments themſelves, which is what we are naturally diſpoſed to do. For a man who has nothing but what he has received, may be as weak and frail, though entruſted to work miracles upon occaſion, as another whom the Supreme Being only puts in proper circumſtances to exert what are conſidered as his natural powers.

If this plan had been the work of men, their tampering with it would have ſoon diſcovered its nature: for when objections of any ſeeming conſequence had been made, thoſe who thought themſelves intereſted in its preſervation, would have been trying to accommodate it to every new hypotheſis, and this muſt have expoſed its *human* foundation to the eyes of the whole world. And I ſuppoſe, that the well-wiſhers to religion, in every age, have heard objections againſt it, which they could have wiſhed to ſee properly refuted, and when that could not be done, even that the very occaſion of them had been taken away. Whence this great reſpect for an impoſition? And why this fear of meddling with the works of their own hands? Or rather, does not this prove beyond contradiction, that it is a ſupernatural work; the very ſtumbling-blocks in it, having too awful an appearance to be touched with ſacrilegious hands?

God's plan ſeems to be the ſame in his natural, and in what, for diſtinction's ſake, we call his ſupernatural diſpenſations: we may deſtroy or neglect the proper means for our bodily preſervation, by not paying a ſufficient attention to the laws of

nature; in the ſame manner, our ſpiritual welfare is entruſted to our own care. We have a part aſſigned us to act, and we are put into certain circumſtances, and find that we have ſo much power over ourſelves, and the nature of things, that we are the firſt to blame ourſelves for a neglect of our duty in any reſpect. We find ourſelves conducted, but not compelled. All things exhibit the appearance of an improving nature in man, and this, not from neceſſity, but voluntarily, as appears by the neglect of too many. And this improvement, we have reaſon to hope, may be carried to a degree which is hardly conceivable in ſuch limited, corrupted, and dependent creatures, by God's interpoſition, according to the plan of Chriſtianity.

What a leſſon will the general judgement afford to the well-diſpoſed, when the ſecrets of all hearts ſhall be laid open! Sufficient, we may ſuppoſe, to preſerve the new world from ſuch a fatal accident as happened to this.

The more ſuch a plan as this is put into the hands of men, and, where that may be impoſſible, the more it is made to paſs through the hands of men, the more likely it appears to be to anſwer the ends which the Supreme Being ſeems to have in view, namely, that of perfecting human nature by the operations of men, in one ſenſe or another.

CHAP.

CHAP. VIII.

Of the Character of Chriſt.

IF what has been ſaid in the laſt chapter be properly conſidered, the appearance of the Son of God in the perſon and character of a man, will be found neither improper nor unneceſſary. To confirm this, let us take a view of his character and behaviour whilſt among men. But here we ſhall err egregiouſly, if we pretend to judge of his conduct according to thoſe rules by which mankind are influenced and governed, on the one hand; or on the other, by thoſe according to which we judge of the attributes of God; theſe are the two extremes which ought to be avoided.

The proper light to view him in, is that of a perſon acting a part aſſigned him, or here more properly a part which he has been pleaſed to take up; neglecting his own natural powers, or concealing them to accommodate himſelf to the character which he had undertaken to repreſent. And thus it muſt become a part of his character to conceal his powers, except in as far as was neceſſary for the work which he had to perform. His character is not to be tried by the attributes of God. It is to be tried by the circumſtances of mankind, and the nature of his office; and if this aſſumed character be ſuited to theſe, his divinity is by no means affected by it. And, if the dignity of the ſubject was not above all compariſon, I would add, no more than the wiſdom of a man could be called in queſtion, becauſe he had repreſented to advantage the character of a fool.

This ſeems to me to account very fully for the great caution uſed by our Saviour to conceal himſelf from the people, in every circumſtance which might diſcover him to be the Meſſiah, except thoſe which could be collected from his foretold character; not, I think, as Locke ſays, that he was afraid to diſcover himſelf before the time; for his prophetic character ſeems to me to be what he wants to diſcover himſelf by, and he wants the inference to be made from this character; and this is the reaſon why it is ſaid ſuch a thing was done that the Scriptures might be fulfilled; as if he had no other motive for doing thoſe things, but only to furniſh the conſiderate and attentive reaſoner with full evidence, that *his* was no new ſcheme, but that he was carrying on the ſcheme delivered in the Old Teſtament; or, to uſe his own expreſſion, that he was not come to deſtroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them.

And if he had appeared in any other character, and exerted the moſt amazing powers in wonders and miracles of every kind daily, he might have forced a reception of himſelf upon mankind, for whatever he pleaſed; but he never could have been conſidered as carrying on the Jewiſh ſcheme, which had been begun ſo many ages before, and bringing it to perfection: and his miracles, had they been never ſo numerous, could not have produced ſo ſtrong an argument as we have at preſent, nor would the conviction have been ſo rational, as that which is forced upon the mind from a long connected plan, carried on through the whole of time, and which we have good reaſon to conclude will only ceaſe with time. Such a connected plan removes all ſuſpicion of any tempo-

rary

rary deluſion, to which it might be pretended a whole nation might be ſubject occaſionally.

His whole character, indeed, is the moſt wonderful that can be conceived, every circumſtance of it manifeſting the commiſſion which he had undertaken. If he had exhibited more or leſs power, it could not have anſwered his purpoſe ſo well. His prophetic character is contradictory to the principles of human nature, but is accurately preſerved by him. His ſtation in the world was ſuch as is looked upon with contempt. But he who knew ſo well what was in man, knew alſo that the difference was immaterial whether he acted the king or the beggar.

Even a mind properly tutored by philoſophy, comes to acknowledge the vanity of all human diſtinctions; though it cannot arrive at ſuch perfection as to be above being influenced by them. And thus we may eaſily conceive, that the moſt ſplendid of human titles would have been particularly degrading to the Son of God. It was wonderful condeſcenſion to take our nature upon him, without the humiliating circumſtance of being ſtill farther encumbered with our vanities.

I ſhall conclude, with obſerving the extraordinary teſtimony which he has left us of the innocence of his character, by chuſing, as his conſtant companion, and witneſs of all his actions, the worſt man, we may ſuppoſe, that ever this world produced, who was preſent with him in public and private, and who would have been forward enough to produce any thing that could have been laid to his charge.

CHAP.

CHAP. IX.

Of the Miracles of Chriſt.

TO the careful obſerver, and unprejudiced reaſoner, even the leſs obvious circumſtances of our Saviour's character and behaviour will carry irreſiſtible conviction along with them; though to the dull apprehenſions of thoſe who cannot go a ſtep beyond the immediate objects of their ſenſes, miracles were neceſſary; and not only neceſſary for this reaſon, but alſo becauſe they make a part of our Saviour's character, that he was the Son of God with power.

But even theſe are not merely wonderful works; for whoever conſiders his miracles with attention, muſt acknowledge, if he knows any thing of human nature, that the very ſelection of them is by no means ſo very obvious. They are not of the kind which an impoſtor could or would try to put upon mankind; and indeed they are of ſuch a kind as he could not poſſibly ſucceed in, among the moſt credulous people. Though they appear to be great and truly ſupernatural when conſidered attentively, yet they are not ſuch as have a tendency to raiſe the wonder and admiration of a multitude. No ſhowy miracles are performed, nor ſuch as are calculated to dazzle and alarm mankind. Diſeaſes are healed, and, in one inſtance, the dead is raiſed, which was certainly done to ſupport his character, as he profeſſed to have power to raiſe the dead; for in his anſwer to the diſciples

diſciples of John the Baptiſt, the dead being raiſed is a circumſtance mentioned.

All his miracles are more than barely ſupernatural wonders; they have beſides their ſupernatural character, a particular application to our Saviour's character and miſſion; and cannot be fully underſtood, unleſs this circumſtance be properly attended to. They were not merely neceſſary to gain credit to him as a ſupernatural teacher, for they muſt be conſidered in relation to the plan which was carrying on, if we would ſee them in their full force.

The objections made to miracles in general, are nothing to the purpoſe. For the nation of the Jews afford as ſtrong a proof of their exiſtence as human nature is capable of giving and receiving upon any ſubject. For the wonders to which they had been eye-witneſſes, form the character of the nation, and which could not have been formed without real miracles. Whenever the characters of nations are different, we have no doubt that circumſtances did exiſt to form that character. There are many things done and ſaid in this country, that will always prove that we enjoyed a free conſtitution; even if a time ſhould come when no ſuch thing as a free conſtitution was to be found any where. And to my apprehenſion, the behaviour and opinions of the Jews prove as fully that they were directed by ſupernatural appearances; as the behaviour and opinions of the reſt of the world ſhew that they have formed themſelves upon natural appearances. For the character of the Jews is entirely diſtinct from the general ſuperſtitious character of mankind.

The weakneſs, knavery, crēdulity, and above all, the diſpoſition to lying, merely to gratify the delight

delight which moſt men take in hearing and reporting marvellous ſtories, ſeem to have perplexed the opinions of mankind upon this ſubject. It would not in the leaſt ſurprize me to hear a perſon affirm, that he himſelf has ſeen whatever has been reported to have happened upon any occaſion. But the world knows how to make a proper eſtimate of ſuch ſtories; and mankind in general were never ſo weak as to be deceived by ſuch things. For ſuch reports have univerſally loſt their credit, ſometimes from the very beginning, and always in a ſhort ſpace of time, either from their want of importance, or their want of credibility; and are now only to be heard of becauſe they furniſh an argument for infidels againſt the miracles related in the Bible.

How comes it to paſs that theſe ſtories are ſo univerſally acknowledged to be falſe, that they can be ſafely uſed as inſtruments for undermining the foundation of the goſpel miracles? The real truth is this; where mankind were in earneſt, they have always thought miracles too hazardous a foundation to build upon; and accordingly no impoſtors, who have had any important ſcheme in hand, have ever meddled with miracles. Private intercourſe with ſupernatural *beings* they have often ventured to feign, becauſe in ſuch caſes they run no hazard of detection, but the performing miracles openly in the face of the world, is what no impoſtor ever attempted.

But if the things performed be not of the nature of thoſe which mankind are apt to forge, and are not imitations of others, and are performed openly before friend and foe, without any expectation raiſed beforehand, but only occaſionally; and eſpecially if they make a part of a plan begun long

long ago, and are attended with conſequences quite out of the reach of human foreſight, and alſo foreign to human purpoſes, theſe things are all to be taken into conſideration, and where all or moſt of theſe circumſtances concur, the moſt miraculous facts will ſupport their credit with every one who knows any thing of ſound reaſoning: and then even the very extraordinary nature of the facts will ſupport and confirm that very plan by which theſe ſupernatural events are in a certain ſenſe ſupported.

Every revelation muſt from the nature of the thing, and the faculties and circumſtances of men, be delivered with ſuch difficulties as would at firſt deſtroy its credibility, merely from the nature and ſingularity of the facts; or if this be not ſo proper an expreſſion to convey my idea, it muſt put mankind upon inquiring after new grounds of conviction: for the opinions of mankind are founded in habits formed by the nature of things and by the whole courſe of our education, which will directly ſtand up againſt theſe ſupernatural facts, and will certainly overpower them unleſs ſome ſtrong motive rouſe the attention.

CHAP. X.

Of Chriſt's Kingdom.

BUT it has been matter of ſurprize, that miracles, which ought to have carried univerſal conviction along with them, being ſuited to the capacity of the moſt ignorant ſpectators, had no more effect upon the Jews, who were eye-witneſſes

neſſes of them, than we find they had. And this makes it neceſſary to conſider what were the circumſtances which ſo blinded the Jews as to prevent that conviction from being produced, which was naturally to be expected; and this ſeems principally to have ariſen from the miſtakes of the Jews concerning the nature of Chriſt's kingdom. The manner in which the Chriſtian diſpenſation is ſpoken of in the prophetic language of the Old Teſtament, joined to their own vanity, led the Jews into a great miſtake concerning the nature of this kingdom. Such expreſſions as this, "and "he ſhall reign over the houſe of Jacob for ever; "and of his kingdom there ſhall be no end;" ſeem to foretel great temporal power and dominion.

Our Saviour takes the greateſt pains to correct their prejudices on this head, both by his conduct and doctrine. And in order to make his character a conſiſtent one, and to agree with the predictions concerning him, it was neceſſary that he ſhould not raiſe the jealouſy of the Romans; for if he had been tried by them as a ſeditious perſon, and condemned, he could not poſſibly have been the Meſſiah of the prophets; and how neceſſary he himſelf thought it to keep up to this character, appears evidently from his uſing the expreſſion ſo often, that he did ſuch a thing that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. And the many prudential ſteps which he is obſerved to take, have all the ſame tendency: for he declares, that it is not from any power or dread of his enemies, but only to keep up to the character foretold of him, that he takes ſuch ſteps as ſeem to imply ſome apprehenſions for himſelf.

Nor

Nor need we doubt but the Roman governor would have been alarmed if our Saviour had been followed by multitudes of tumultuous people: and accordingly we find his doctrines particularly calculated to diſcourage ſuch; and we may fairly conclude, that this, among other ends, was the intention of ſome of his longeſt addreſſes to the people. And the expreſſion which introduces the ſermon on the mount, is expreſs to this purpoſe: "And ſeeing the multitudes, &c." And it is very probable, that after the clear and poſitive manner in which he declares his ſentiments, as we find them delivered in this ſermon, theſe multitudes diſperſed very quietly, and with no ſmall diſappointment, upon finding that he was not the perſon they had taken him for.

Now, although from ſeeing his miracles they might be well ſatisfied that he had power to gratify all their wiſhes, yet, after ſuch an explicit declaration of his principles, they well knew that he never would comply with their inclinations. And the perverſe notions which the whole body of the Jews entertained upon this ſubject, give a particular force and propriety to the doctrines contained in the ſermon on the mount, when conſidered as intended to cure their prejudices concerning the nature of Chriſt's kingdom. And it was certainly a neceſſary part of his office, upon all occaſions, to ſet the Jews right in this particular, to ſhew them the impropriety of the Meſſiah's taking ſuch meaſures to eſtabliſh his kingdom, however great his power, which inſtead of reforming the manners of mankind, would give the Jews a licence for indulging themſelves in all kinds of exceſs, and would become a ſtanding

authority for the practice of tyranny in all ſucceeding ages.

For if we conſider the ſtate of the Jews at the time of our Saviour's coming, we may eaſily imagine with what *ſpirit* many of the people followed him, upon ſeeing the miracles which he performed. Eſpecially as his miracles could leave them no room to doubt, that he had certainly the power, provided he had the inclination of reſtoring the kingdom to Iſrael. And the common principles of human nature will tell us what would be their expectations, when ſuch an event took place. No leſs, we may believe, than the expectation of trampling their enemies under their feet; indulging themſelves in revenge for real or ſuppoſed injuries; ſhaking off the Roman yoke, and expecting beſides an opportunity of gratifying every ſenſual appetite.

A people in ſuch circumſtances, and with ſuch expectations, ſtood in need of conſtant admonitions and informations to draw them out of their error. And there muſt have been a particular air of authority in our Saviour's teaching, that they could even bear to hear a doctrine carrying ſuch a particular ſting with it, when conſidered as diſappointing their fondeſt hopes and expectations.

And that theſe reproofs and admonitions were continued through the whole of our Saviour's miniſtry, may, among other reaſons, be owing to this, that the wiſer ſort of Jews might for ſome time imagine that he uſed policy to conceal his real deſigns, and only waited for a fit opportunity to put them in execution; which was particularly the caſe with his diſciples: though it is alſo true

that the Jews, of the higher rank, were ſcandalized at the mean character which he aſſumed.

But at length the whole nation, putting all circumſtances together, gave up all hopes of deliverance through his means; having been frequently diſappointed both by his miracles and doctrine: the former confirming them more and more in their notions of his irreſiſtible power, and the little occaſion which he had for watching favourable opportunities to put any ſcheme in execution; while the latter would convince them that they could expect no benefit from him in the only way which they wiſhed.

And thus the joint influence of his doctrine and miracles produced a moſt extraordinary, though a very natural effect among the Jews, and what neither of them could have done ſingly. For their minds, having been ſo long agitated between hope and fear, they felt their diſappointment ſo ſenſibly, that it was followed by the hatred and deteſtation of the whole people, which ſhewed itſelf with aggravated maliciouſneſs, unparalleled in the hiſtory of any nation. For their behaviour when he was condemned, and at the time of his crucifixion, ſhews the ſpiteful gratification which they enjoyed in thinking that they had been able to deſtroy a power which they could not turn to their own advantage.

And thus the very worſt part of the behaviour of the Jews is a ſtrong proof that they had ſeen and believed the miracles of our Saviour; and the reality of the miracles is one of the cauſes why the Jews reject Chriſt for their Saviour. Even Barabbas, or any ſower of ſedition, would anſwer the expectations of ſuch a people better, than the mild and upright Jeſus, with the power of working miracles.

CHAP. XI.

Of the Propagation of the Goſpel.

WE are told by St. Mark, that before our Saviour left the world, he gave this commiſſion to his diſciples; "And he ſaid unto them, Go ye "into all the world, and preach the goſpel to "every creature." This is certainly a very extraordinary commiſſion, in whatever point of view it is conſidered. For an undertaking of this ſort has numberleſs difficulties attending it, from the extenſive nature of the plan, even if the execution were to be attended with every favourable circumſtance; ſuch as a people naturally diſpoſed to learn, and teachers properly qualified to execute the orders which they had received. What opinion would a thinking man be apt to entertain of the ſucceſs of ſuch a ſcheme, upon taking into the account the obſtinacy and unteachable diſpoſition of mankind, joined to a natural averſion from the principles which it was propoſed to communicate to them? Surely he would be apt to conclude from the perverſe nature of man, and his proneneſs to evil, that this taſk, though it was nothing but laying goodneſs and virtue before all mankind, could never be enjoined by one "who "knew what was in man," but ought rather to be looked upon, as the benevolent effuſion of a heart conſcious of its own uprightneſs, but without the leaſt experience of human affairs.

But when the character and learning of thoſe to whom this commiſſion is delivered are taken into

into conſideration, every one would be ready to declare, that this was certainly a very harmleſs commiſſion, but the moſt ridiculous that ever was given, and a thing that, in the event, muſt ruin the character of its author, if he had any to loſe.

We find Livy producing the following argument as concluſive againſt the common opinion, that Numa received his inſtruction from Pythagoras; "Ex quibus locis, etſi ejuſdem ætatis fuiſſet, "qua fama in Sabinos aut quo linguæ commercio "quenquam ad cupiditatem diſcendi exciviſſet; "quove præſidio, unus per tot gentes, diſſonas "ſermone moribuſque perveniſſet?"

With what propriety might theſe queſtions have been aſked upon the occaſion of this miſſion of eleven fiſhermen, from ſo ſmall a corner of the globe as Judea, and even from the moſt contemptible part of that little ſpot, which had been induſtriouſly ſeparated from the reſt of the world, both in religion and language.

Well might it have been aſked, What reputation had theſe fiſhermen acquired, either for learning, or the arts of perſuaſion, (for they could not ſpeak their own language with propriety) that they, of all others, ſhould be employed, with the leaſt probable expectation, that even their own countrymen would liſten to their doctrine, had it been in no wiſe inconſiſtent with their prejudices.

Yet what are we to think when their commiſſion extended not only to the inſtructing of their own countrymen, nor indeed ſimply to the teaching of all mankind, but to no leſs an object than the reformation of the whole world; not from ordinary ignorance and corruption, but from thoſe corrup-

tions and errors which have the deepeſt root in human nature, as ſpringing directly from thoſe paſſions and enjoyments which mankind are moſt greedily addicted to.

Surely it might very naturally be made a queſtion, By what intercourſe of language, were they to deliver their ſentiments in ſuch a manner as to be able to raiſe the expectations, and fix the attention of thoſe to whoſe language they were perfect ſtrangers, and whoſe morals, religion, and ſettled cuſtoms they were to aboliſh or reform?

Or, Who was to guard them in their journey through ſo many nations, differing not only from them, but alſo from one another, in their language and manners?

If we had nothing but report, that ſuch a ſcheme had been ſet on foot, and that it had ſucceeded, notwithſtanding all theſe unfavourable circumſtances; and if any ſtreſs ſhould be laid on ſuch a ſtory, as an argument for bridling the paſſions of mankind, how loud would our preſent race of freethinkers be in their declamations, and how poſitive in their reaſonings, that human nature was by no means able to ſupport the credit of ſuch a ſtory; and that the very mention of ſuch a thing as the work of man, carried a direct and poſitive lie along with it; or, to uſe the expreſſion of a free-thinker, that the argument againſt it was as ſtrong as any argument from experience could be.

But now that the fact is evident and certain, and even ſenſible to our daily experience; all this turns out to be the craft and cunning of thoſe ſimple and illiterate fiſhermen; working upon the minds of ſimple people violently addicted to their own

own prejudices, whoſe language and manners they were ſtrangers to.

Now, although this opinion of the free-thinkers can never be taken up by any rational creature, who is in the leaſt acquainted with the circumſtances of this hiſtory; yet the paſſions and inclinations of mankind, and the whole courſe of worldly affairs, are ſuch enemies to the truths which the goſpel conveys, that the thoughts of men may be eaſily turned away from paying a proper attention to ſuch ſubjects, by the little plauſible cávils of infidels, did not Chriſtian ſocieties keep up a ſucceſſion of men to watch over the intereſts of religion, and refute ſuch objections as might daily ariſe.

And this ſeems to me to be moſt effectually done, by pointing out the extenſive plan of religion, and particularly by explaining and inſiſting upon thoſe points which diſtinguiſh this ſcheme from natural events and human projects, and particularly by fixing our attention upon thoſe grand events, when God ſeems compleatly to have taken this work out of the hands of men.

Now, the manner in which the Chriſtian Religion has been propagated, is undoubtedly one of the ſtrongeſt arguments for its divine original; and the wonderful gift of tongues is certainly one of the chief inſtruments of its propagation: it may therefore be proper, in this argument, to inquire a little particularly into the nature, dignity, and influence of this extraordinary gift, as a proof that this religion comes from God, by ſhewing that it never could have ſuited human purpoſes to feign pretenſions to ſuch a gift; and that it is only in the hand of God that its uſe and importance can be ſeen.

It is reaſonable to conclude, from the behaviour of the diſciples, at the time when our Saviour delivered their commiſſion to them, that this extraordinary injunction of teaching all the world, did not appear to them to be by any means above their power to perform: they make no remonſtrances, as we find Moſes doing upon a much leſs affair, and in very different circumſtances. For although they had no conception of the manner or means by which this great work was to be brought about, yet inſtead of ſhewing any backwardneſs to undertake it, we have good reaſon to think, that they were diſpoſed to ſet about its execution without the proper qualification; otherwiſe it could not have been neceſſary to give it them in charge not to depart from Jeruſalem, but *wait for the promiſe of the Father.*

This confidence is not difficult to be accounted for, becauſe it ſeems naturally to have ariſen from the frequent ſupernatural exertions of power to which they had been accuſtomed, or rather habituated; and which they could have no doubt would be ſufficient for any purpoſe; and as they had experienced already in themſelves the power of working miracles, they might conceive this power to be adequate to all their purpoſes; and ſo we may believe the generality of mankind would have thought. And although their Maſter had told them that the ſpeaking with tongues was to be one of the ſigns of thoſe who were to believe, yet I am well perſuaded that they were not then fully ſenſible of the great advantage of this gift; much leſs of the neceſſity of it for the purpoſe of their miſſion.

But God, who knows the nature of man, knew alſo that the fulleſt power of working miracles or wonders,

wonders, would not be ſufficient for this grand purpoſe of deſtroying the kingdom of Satan, and reforming the world.

If, indeed, there had been nothing farther propoſed, than to raiſe the wonder and admiration of the nations, (which would have been the only end which an impoſtor could propoſe to himſelf) and to play upon their credulity, and to turn their fears and ſimplicity to worldly advantage, the working of wonders would have been the deſirable gift. And this gift of tongues would have appeared ſo inadequate to the ſchemes and views of an impoſtor; that the feigning of it never could have been ſuggeſted to him by his wants, upon any occaſion, as his deſign is only to deceive, and not to reform, and therefore could hardly be ſuppoſed to enter into his head; or if it had, the advantage of it would have appeared ſo trifling, that he never could have entertained a wiſh for a qualification, of which he could neither conceive the uſe nor importance.

This, however, will be ſtill more evident, if we take a curſory view of the ends propoſed by the different pretenders to ſupernatural power, or the particular favour and aſſiſtance of the gods. The plan of ſuch impoſtors is not to teach mankind; to what purpoſe then would it be to pretend to a gift, which could be only of uſe where ſomething was to be communicated to the people of a ſtrange language? Eſpecially when we conſider ſuch pretenſions as coming from one who could have no other ſcheme than what was, in ſome way or other, to anſwer his own temporal purpoſes; which would certainly be brought about moſt effectually by exciting terror, wonder, or admiration. And ſurely to hear a ſtranger ſpeaking

in one's own tongue, is not the likelieſt means of raiſing theſe paſſions.

The fruits of an impoſtor's labours muſt be near in proſpect; whatever was to look very far into futurity, could have no charms for him, but more particularly with ſo diſmal a proſpect as the Chriſtian Religion exhibited at its firſt ſetting out in the world. For this religion, even after our Saviour's aſcenſion, had a great deal leſs than nothing to engage the attention of a deceiver, ſuppoſing his ambition to have been of that moderate kind which is to be gratified by the diſtant view of propagating an opinion once to become general, for even this ſmall gratification had every human probability againſt it.

But let us conſider thoſe uſes to which mankind have applied their pretenſions to ſupernatural power or aid; and by examining theſe, it will be eaſy to conjecture of what account ſuch pretenders would have held the gift of tongues.

Princes and rulers made uſe of ſuch pretenſions, to eaſe themſelves of the very great trouble of governing a paſſionate, ignorant, and diſorderly multitude; or, to ſpeak more properly, perhaps ſuch pretenſions were neceſſary to render ſuch a government by any means practicable; becauſe the paſſions of a lawleſs, ignorant multitude, could never be kept within any bounds by pretenſions merely human; ignorance not being capable of liſtening to reaſon, but only of being affected by ſuch things as raiſe wonder and dread. Peace, therefore, would be the object of ſuch pretenders to ſupernatural power; and terrible things, ſuch as alarm the minds of men, would be the inſtruments neceſſary for this purpoſe, and ſuch as princes and rulers would wiſh for the poſſeſſion

of: and what they had not in their power, their whole art and induſtry would be employed in feigning, as far as they could hope for credit, ſuch pretenſions being abſolutely neceſſary for their purpoſe: and liars by profeſſion would make an eſſential part of ſuch a government, not the enthuſiaſtic liar, but the ſober, ſedate impoſtor.

When his ſubjects became clamorous or unruly, a prince would never think that the faculty of ſpeaking to them in an unknown tongue was what his government, upon that emergency, required: all his wiſhes and ambition would be to have the darting of Jupiter's thunder; and all his lying and impoſition would tend to propagate an opinion among mankind, either that he was poſſeſſed of it, or if that could not be, at leaſt that he could command it; as there were certain actions that would infallibly bring it down. And by ſuch lying wonders was the kingdom of Satan eſtabliſhed in the world.

There have alſo been in the world an inferior kind of pretenders to ſupernatural power, known by the name of ſorcerers, whoſe ſole end was to delude the vulgar, and ſuch as have vulgar underſtandings, out of a little money, in exchange for their art; whoſe influence could never extend beyond the procuring a precarious ſubſiſtence from the credulity and admiration of the multitude.

Dread and terror, therefore, would be the paſſions which princes and rulers would endeavour chiefly to inſpire into their ſubjects; and the whole force of the ſorcerer's art would be employed in raiſing the wonder and admiration of the multitude; and thus it would become the aim and intereſt of both theſe kinds of pretenders, that many

many ſtories ſhould be propagated to raiſe and keep up theſe ſeveral paſſions; which would all contain much of the marvelous to gratify the natural deſires of the people, who in their rude ſtate are only to be pleaſed with ſuch narrations; and theſe ſtories would, in ſome meaſure, form the characters of their gods, who indeed are eaſily traced to the mould in which they were caſt. Nothing, therefore, could have been ſo uſeleſs, or ſo hazardous, as the pretenſion to a gift of tongues, for all the purpoſes which impoſtors and pretenders to ſupernatural aid or power have had to anſwer by their forgeries.

Let us next conſider how well it ſuits with the Chriſtian ſcheme, and how eſſentially neceſſary it was for carrying on God's plan in the world. This, indeed, is very different from the views either of kings or ſorcerers, being ſuch as are by no means ſuited to mere human wants or human proſpects. By this ſcheme mankind were neither to be terrified, ſurprized, or amuſed, but they were to be taught and reformed; nor was this object the reformation or inſtruction of a few individuals; but the command is to teach all mankind; "go ye into all the world, and preach the goſpel "to every creature."

But how is this taſk to be performed? Even the working of miracles would be, by no means, ſufficient for this purpoſe; for it could anſwer no good end to alarm the fears, and rouſe the attention of mankind, if nothing was to follow: for their attention would be gained to no purpoſe, if no inſtruction or reformation was to follow or accompany ſuch marvellous works; the teacher would nevertheleſs be a barbarian among thoſe whoſe language he was ignorant of. The gift of tongues

tongues, therefore, was abſolutely neceſſary for the propagation of the goſpel in that full manner which was intended and accompliſhed.

The Supreme Being ſeems but little careful to ſuit his diſpenſations to thoſe forms which moſt readily draw the attention, and gain the admiration or approbation of men; and therefore it is that the wiſe men of this world are not taken with the moſt ſignal marks of God's interpoſition, as they are paſſing before their eyes; but nevertheleſs they ſeem to be admirably calculated for engaging the wonder and admiration of the ſerious and thinking part of mankind, particularly of poſterity, when they are properly diſpoſed to take a ſerious view of the ſubject: and eſpecially we of this age have much greater opportunities, and are better qualified to judge of the greatneſs and good effects of this miracle of the gift of tongues, than if we had lived at the very time when it happened; and, I may add, than if we had heard the Apoſtles ſpeak with thoſe very tongues. For we can trace the good effects of it through many regions of the earth, and thus form a proper notion of its uſe and importance, and alſo come to be fully perſuaded that this commiſſion of teaching all nations was the moſt important, the moſt neceſſary, and the hardeſt to be put in practice of all others.

For although it was a neceſſary, it was not an eaſy leſſon which the nations were to be taught; it was not a bare ignorance which was to be overcome, but rooted and inveterate prejudices which were to be got the better of: in ſhort, the kingdom of Satan was to be aboliſhed, which had got ſuch a firm footing in the hearts of men, that no human power was a match for it. Indeed,

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as to human arts, the kingdom of Satan was already in poſſeſſion of them; and *the rulers of the darkneſs of this world*, had applied every one of them to their own purpoſes, in ſome ſhape or other: and becauſe particularly at the time of our Saviour's coming, if we take an impartial view of the ſtate of the heathens, this kingdom ſeems to have been the moſt firmly eſtabliſhed, having, beſides the arts, got all the moſt violent human paſſions and deſires on its ſide.

Now it can hardly be doubted that proper meditations upon ſuch a victory as this ought to operate more effectually upon a well-informed and well-diſpoſed mind, than any tranſient acts of power exhibited to the ſenſes, however great they might be.

And thus, this ſingle gift of tongues, conſidered in its cauſes and its conſequences, appears of itſelf to be a concluſive argument for the truth of the Chriſtian Religion, ſerving admirably to diſtinguiſh the immediate works of God from the forgeries and pretended wonders of impoſtors of all kinds. And this argument I conſider as concluſive; becauſe, if the finger of God is to be ſeen for certain in any part of this work of the propagation of the goſpel, I do not conſider the proof as in the leaſt affected by objections brought againſt particular parts of this ſcheme: not even if it ſhould be ſhewn that human arts had no ſmall ſhare in the propagation of Chriſtianity, and other means which have little appearance of a divine original.

The truth or falſhood of ſuch aſſertions, I am not concerned with at preſent, becauſe I contend that if they were even true, my argument is not in the leaſt affected by them, as they may be conceived

ceived as parts of a plan very conſiſtent with God's method of governing the world. For it is not ſo much the things that are ſaid, as the manner of ſaying them, that can give any juſt grounds to conclude that ſuch objections are made with any view or intention unfriendly to religion.

But there is a very unphiloſophical way which the free-thinkers have got into of ſuppoſing particular attributes to belong to God, not like the faculties of a free agent, but rather as moulded into the form and nature of definitions, from which notions every thing relating to the Deity is to be derived conſequentially; like mathematical concluſions from the properties of extenſion. And thus they ſet about trying the circumſtances of a revelation by theſe notions of their own: and very impiouſly pretend to ſay, that particular things or plans are unworthy of God, without paying any attention to matter of fact. Now this is not ſimply bad divinity, but it is according to the plan of the very worſt philoſophy that ever appeared in the world. But if ſuch reaſoners, laying aſide their own imaginations, would attend to facts as delivered in Scripture, they will find a conſiſtent plan carrying on through the whole: and that this plan is not ſo much carried on according to the glorious attributes which we very juſtly aſcribe to God, as according to that weakneſs which we find in man. In diſpenſing the bleſſings of a revelation, the Supreme Being does not ſo much appear in his majeſty, as in the more humble character of a teacher of the human race; neither overpowering their underſtandings, nor forcing their wills. It is only "he that "hath ears to hear, let him hear;" leaving men free agents, and yet throwing circumſtances in their

their way, which, by a proper uſe of their ſenſes and underſtandings, will certainly lead them to happineſs, and bring human nature to as great a degree of perfection as it is capable to be brought, making every thing as much as poſſible ſeem to be the work of men. And therefore this very ſcheme, to a ſuperficial obſerver, might ſeem to partake of human weakneſs, when it is, in fact, the greateſt proof of condeſcenſion and wiſdom.

And beſides, the providence of God appears to permit that men ſhould mix in this plan, what may be properly called their own, when it will anſwer the purpoſe; and theſe parts the infidel fixes upon, and contends that all the reſt is to be referred to the ſame original.

But ſurely it is no difficult thing to conceive, that it may be very eaſy for ſuch a *Being* as the Deiſt himſelf allows God to be, to make a perfect creature: therefore he might, no doubt, at once have given human nature all the perfection of which it is capable. Yet ſurely it is a much greater diſplay of wiſdom to contrive matters ſo as to make ſuch a being as man, with all his imperfections about him, ſo very inſtrumental in perfecting his own nature, as he is made to be according to the plan which I have been endeavouring to explain.

Eleven fiſhermen ſet out from Judæa, without learning, and even without any proper notions of the buſineſs they were about, as appears from the very laſt queſtion that they aſk our Saviour, "Lord, wilt thou, at this time, reſtore the kingdom to Iſrael?" They ſet out to inſtruct the world in a new religion, and, what was more difficult, to deſtroy the old, which had the ſupport of power, prejudices, paſſion, and intereſt, being modelled

modelled according to the wiſhes of mankind. Nobody ſurely but God, could give the leaſt proſpect of ſucceſs to ſuch an unreaſonable undertaking.

How different were the ſchemes of philoſophers for improving mankind, ſo very excellent in themſelves, that they will never perhaps appear mean, upon any occaſion, except upon a compariſon with this teaching. A philoſopher thought it practicable to communicate a few notions, which were at variance with no particular paſſions or appetites; and this he had hopes of doing with ſucceſs, to a few only of thoſe who ſpoke the ſame language, and who had alſo the ſame manners and diſpoſitions.

But what would he have thought of the propoſal of teaching the whole world; all nations, however different their language, and however various their manners and humours? And to teach them, not ſuch things as are ſuitable, and even agreeable to human frailty, or might flatter human pride; but ſuch things as every one to whom they were propoſed, would be ready to ſay, "theſe are hard "ſayings; who can hear them?"

In ſhort, this is ſuch a plan as hath nothing in common with the learning of philoſophers, or the ſchemes of politicians, or the tricks of impoſtors; nor indeed hath it any thing in it of the nature of man: and yet, what is very ſurprizing, ſo much hath God accommodated himſelf to the nature of man, in the ſeveral human inſtruments that he has made uſe of, that an argument has been formed ſufficient to miſlead thoſe, who take only a partial view of things, into an opinion as if the whole was a work of human contrivance. Now this diſpenſation, on the contrary, appears to have a wonderful

wonderful beauty in it, at the ſame time that it diſplays the wiſdom of God, by ſetting that wiſdom in a point of view, in which it could not have appeared without ſuch a frail creature as man to work with. For by permitting men to mix of their own, provided it was true, and to the purpoſe, with whatever he communicates to them, God has beautifully adapted this ſcheme to the human capacity, by making as much of it as poſſible the work of man.

So that whatever human interpoſition can be ſhewn to have taken place in the propagation of the goſpel, appears to be a beauty in this ſyſtem, and is what one might expect from the general plan of God's providence: the main argument not being in the leaſt affected by this conceſſion, ſo long as the entire ſcheme is beyond the power of human contrivance, and even after it was contrived beyond the power of man to execute.

CHAP. XII.

Of the Perfection of the Chriſtian Religion.

THE Chriſtian Religion, if once believed to be true, affords the compleateſt ſatisfaction to the mind; and leaves us nothing beyond either to hope or fear: for it fully ſatisfies the paſſions both of hope and fear, which are by no means the eaſieſt to gratify of thoſe found in human nature.

To ſay nothing of the heathen ſuperſtitions, even the Jewiſh diſpenſation is very imperfect, and can afford no real ſatisfaction to the mind: it is only

only a ſcheme in *embryo*, though ſupported and carried on by divine aſſiſtance and authority, and is by no means capable of ſatisfying the mind with regard to any of thoſe material points upon which we want information moſt. It does not bring life and immortality to light. It exhibits God as partial, condeſcending to become the teacher and conductor of a particular people, very ſmall in compariſon of the bulk of mankind, at the ſame time that he leaves the reſt of the world to follow their own inventions.

But the Chriſtian ſcheme is compleat from the time that our Saviour ſaid, "It is finiſhed;" there was nothing farther neceſſary but to publiſh to the world what had been done; and this was particularly the office of the Holy Spirit to do. We have no farther information to expect on this ſubject, nor is it probable that human nature is capable of receiving any more; what remains being ſuch things "as eyes have not ſeen, nor ears heard, "neither hath it entered into the heart of man to "conceive."

The great plan for the redemption of mankind is finiſhed in this world whenever this religion is univerſally underſtood and acknowledged; when mankind are made ſenſible of the nature and cauſe of their infirmities, and the proper remedies for them: and then human nature will be ſo far corrected and reformed, and all irregular paſſions ſubdued, ſo far at leaſt that we may begin another world with much greater advantages, than we ſhould have done this, even if Adam had not fallen: ſo that the whole will doubtleſs appear a beautiful and wiſe and good and conſiſtent plan; and the evils which we ſee, or pretend to ſee, will be found to be imaginary, or perhaps real good,

or elſe will be rectified or done away. What an inſight into human nature will the day of judgement alone give, when the ſecrets of all hearts will be laid open! What a leſſon will this be for our future behaviour in the ſtate where we may be placed. This world will then appear to advantage, as a ſtate of probation, and we ſhall be able to proceed with confidence, by ſeeing experimentally what human nature, aſſiſted by the Chriſtian Religion, can do, or has been able to do; and by having a perfect ſenſe of the ill behaviour of ourſelves and others, this will be ſufficient warning againſt becoming the ſlaves of temptations however artfully engaging.

No man that believes ſincerely in the Chriſtian Religion, can want any farther information; he knows his beginning, and is alſo ſufficiently informed of his end: he ſees that God has intereſted himſelf too much in the affairs of this world, not to be fully perſuaded that he will finiſh conſiſtently what he has conducted ſo far. And from the wonderful diſplay of power which has been made in this world, we may be perſuaded that a ſituation will be prepared for us, of which at preſent we can form no conception, it being far beyond the reach of human imagination, and eſſentially different from thoſe notions which the heathens had of a future ſtate, which obviouſly betray their original, by the reſemblance which they bear to the little partial prejudices of mankind. But there is one extraordinary weakneſs that ſticks to their ſcheme, which is this, that though they ſtrip mankind of their bodies in a future ſtate, yet they were obliged to confine their happineſs to ſenſual pleaſures, or at leaſt ſuch as were enjoyed by them in this world; and theſe, for want of

organs, they are reduced to the neceſſity of abridging very much, ſo that a heathen future ſtate is nothing even to this world for enjoyment.

But mark, on the other hand, the difference between this and the rewards propoſed by the Chriſtian Religion: though the grand doctrine of this religion is the reſurrection of the body, yet we are carried to gratifications entirely ſpiritual, and ſuch as we, while inhabitants of this world, can have no conception of. No reſemblance to any thing in this world, is promiſed us in the next, it will be ſomething entirely new: and thus only could it be worthy of the mighty *apparatus* which has been made for it.

We may know from our own experience, that none of the fabulous accounts of the elyſian fields could afford us the leaſt ſatisfaction, and that every rational man muſt turn from them with contempt, even if he believed them to be true; and with very unfavourable notions of the attributes of the gods, for not being able to provide for mankind a future ſtate equal in enjoyment to this world.

And this ought to give great ſatisfaction to a Chriſtian, and even ſtrengthen his faith, that he has ſomething to expect which muſt far ſurpaſs any thing which his own imagination can reach. And thus God's ways will be found wonderfully wiſe, both with regard to what he diſcovers to us, and in what he conceals, thus raiſing our expectations upon good grounds, from earthly to heavenly things, and from material and corporeal to ſpiritual enjoyments. And even this diſpenſation, if ſeriouſly conſidered, will make a very ſtrong argument for the truth of our religion, by diſcovering that the whole plan is wonderfully of a piece.

No ſteps taken to pre-engage the attention of mankind, no flattering them with gaudy proſpects, or with the gratification of ſuch paſſions as engage our chief attention in this world. The whole ſyſtem keeps one uniform tenor, every thing is ſet fairly before man, and he may attend to, or neglect this information at his peril.

The neceſſities and circumſtances of men urge them on to a ſpeedy execution of their projects, and make them force prematurely into light every thing that can engage the attention of the world. And this is their wiſdom, being only children of a day, and even ignorant what that day may bring forth. But the Supreme Being, who has all eternity at his command, can execute his plans in whatever manner he pleaſes, and is not likely to condeſcend to humour the unreaſonable with that kind of evidence which they fancy ſhould be laid before them, which is very *modeſtly* requiring that God ſhould work after their plan: but he goes on to act according to his own, which we are required to attend to, and expect nothing elſe.

And the human agents whom God has employed in this work of our redemption, diſcover the original from whence they derive their knowledge, by their manner of acting. The important office with which they are entruſted, never raiſes their pride ſo as to make them forget that they have this gift in earthen veſſels, and therefore they diſcover no impatience, but wait for their information with all due humility. But this is never the way by which impoſtors proceed; they ſhew not only a willingneſs, but even a forwardneſs to gratify thoſe whoſe attention they would engage; and by profeſſing and promiſing too much, diſcover that they can do nothing.

Human

Human nature may, in this world, exhibit all the different temptations to which fleſh and blood can be liable, and they may all have been reſiſted by different men, though that degree of perfection is not to be expected from any ſingle individual; and this may be a kind of practical ſtandard of what human nature can do, or at leaſt prepare us for the reception of thoſe favours which our Saviour will certainly beſtow upon thoſe who ſincerely believe in him.

And thus men may be prepared by the diſcipline of this world, ſo as to be fit for the future ſtate in which they are to be placed, with a power over their paſſions acquired by experience. And they may be made capable of the greateſt enjoyment, without any danger of running into exceſs, and abuſing the favours of Chriſt; having their faculties ſo ſuited to the means of gratification, that they may be ſafely allowed the proſpect of all ſorts of enjoyments, and objects of temptation, without the danger of committing ſuch a ſin as the eating the forbidden fruit.

THE CONCLUSION.

I Have now finiſhed my argument, in which the very difficulties which we find in Revelation, are conſidered as one very ſtrong proof of its divine authority. My principles do not lead to any dogmatical concluſions, but rather to engage the mind, at an awful diſtance, to take a proſpect of the natural world, of mankind, and of religion. They are all the work of God, and may all three be ſtudied to the great improvement of human nature.

The facts, upon which the evidence for the Chriſtian Religion reſts, are ſo ſingular, ſo ſtriking, ſo numerous, and connected together for ſuch a length of time, that there ſeems nothing to prevent the opinions of mankind from being more uniform upon this ſubject, than upon any other whatever. The candidates for the kingdom of heaven have no occaſion for harbouring any of thoſe jealouſies that perplex and inflame the little factious conteſts of worldly-minded men.

However, when we conſider that the world has been ſo often deluded by falſe pretences to inſpiration, and ſupernatural aſſiſtance, it is both neceſſary, and for the credit of our religion, that the grounds of our belief ſhould undergo a very ſerious and impartial examination. And although I have

I have endeavoured to ſhew that human reaſon is very unequal to the taſk, either of diſcovering or propagating a true religion, yet it is the beſt natural means which we have of ſecuring ourſelves from being impoſed upon by a falſe one. And we are even commanded in Scripture to " be " ready to give an anſwer to every one who aſks " us a reaſon of the hope which is in us."

Nor has the preſent age been backward in furniſhing us with occaſion for practiſing this part of our duty. For we have been harraſſed by infidel writers with objections phyſical, metaphyſical, and philological; and in the characters of Jews, Turks, and Buffoons.

It is not the objections made to the Chriſtian Religion that I find fault with, it is the manner in which they are made and received. One might at leaſt expect that a pure religion, calculated to ſupply every defect which the mind finds in itſelf, would at leaſt be as favourably received as an ordinary piece of good news, and would only leave the mind in a ſtate of anxiety and ſuſpence, but with our ears open to every argument which could ſtrengthen our conviction, from an apprehenſion that it might not be true. But many write, and are heard againſt Chriſtianity, with ſuch a ſpirit and diſpoſition, as could only be juſtifiable if the whole ſcheme and intention of it was to bring deſtruction to the human race.

A ſecond thing deſerving blame in the conduct of infidel writers, is their diſcharging their arrows at random, without any ſettled ſcheme but that of doing miſchief. The moſt plauſible pretence for infidelity being the dangerous and pernicious conſequences of ſuperſtition, if the free-thinkers were true to this principle, they ought to join with

us in eſtabliſhing Chriſtianity, as we have the proof of experience, as I have ſhewn in this argument, that it is the only ſure bulwark againſt ſuperſtition.

For the abſurd notions which even the wiſeſt men of antiquity entertained upon religious ſubjects, prove beyond all diſpute, that no degree of mere human wiſdom is a ſufficient guard for us againſt becoming the dupes of the groſſeſt ſuperſtitions. They, therefore, who are for bringing down religion to the teſt and ſtandard of human reaſon, would do well to conſider, that if they were to ſucceed in their ſcheme, and deſtroy the credit of the Chriſtian Religion, mankind would naturally fall back into their original ſuperſtitions, and become the dupes of their own fears and of freſh impoſtors.

The infidels, therefore, if they underſtood their own ſcheme, (which makes me ſuſpect that they have no other beſides that of bringing a railing accuſation againſt religion) ought to confeſs that a belief in the Chriſtian Religion, is the greateſt advance that ever has been made towards perfecting their plan; and therefore they ought to take breath and look around them, and conſider whether this is not as much as human nature can bear in the way of a reformation from ſuperſtition. Becauſe, without proper notions of God, and a well authenticated account of his manner of dealing with mankind, we ſhall always be ſlaves to endleſs ſuperſtitions. We contend, that the Bible contains all this in the greateſt perfection; the infidels ſhould either produce a more authentic account than ours, or if they find that impoſſible, try to overlook or mend the flaws which they pretend to diſcover in ours, as this is the beſt

remedy

remedy which the nature of things can bear. Pulling to pieces and demoliſhing, is a good mob amuſement, but a time will come when every one muſt ſeek for ſhelter: and therefore it would be but rational and proper to look forward, and take a view of the habitation which is preparing for us by theſe projectors.

But neither this world, nor the next, can ſubſiſt upon the infidel plan: for if we were to allow that a ſolitary Atheiſt might exiſt, a nation of Atheiſts is as great a contradiction to uniform experience, as any abſurdity which can be imagined: and it would be juſt as wiſe a project to ſet about twiſting ropes of ſand, as to try to unite Atheiſts in a ſociety. An Atheiſt may cling to a ſociety, as ſome creeping weeds do to trees, and while he is corrupting it, may be conſidered by fools as an ornament to it. Freethinkers and ſubtle thinkers are the froth of ſociety, which is only kept at the top by the fermentation of the *ſubſtance* below.

Mankind will, therefore, always have gods of ſome kind or another, and conſequently a religion; and it lies upon the infidels to prove that it will be ſuch a rational one as Chriſtianity. We find that every ſpecies of knowledge has its proper organ of conveyance to the mind: ſounds come in by the ear, and colours by the eye, but to judge of Religion as ſome men do, ſeems to be acting as wiſely, as if one were to judge of the ſmoothneſs of a ſurface by his ſmell.

We ſhould be told particularly what the diſcoveries are which would compleatly overturn the Chriſtian Religion, and then one could form ſome eſtimate how near the infidels are to the compleating of their taſk. Becauſe in an affair of ſuch

general importance as religion, it is abſolutely neceſſary that every man ſhould have ſome ſettled opinion; and it therefore becomes his duty, after the moſt diligent ſearch, to ſit down contented with the beſt opinion which he has been able to form, and to reſt ſatisfied with that evidence which the nature of the ſubject will admit of, without trifling with himſelf, or ſuffering himſelf to be trifled with by others: but eſpecially before he determines againſt the Chriſtian Religion, it may be uſeful for him to conſider, that whenever things admit of demonſtrative proof, it can be proved with equal clearneſs, that one thing is falſe, and another true; therefore, if one determine to reſt ſatisfied with nothing leſs than demonſtration, why fall in with the opinions of infidels? How do they prove that there is no God? How do they prove that he does not conduct the affairs of this world? They ought not to be ſatisfied with making objections to our ſcheme of revelation; let them take the poſitive ſide, and eſtabliſh a ſyſtem of infidelity, without ſuppoſing that there ever was ſuch a thing as religion in the world; I mean, to write a ſyſtem of faith for mankind, without taking any notice of revelation. Nothing could more effectually ſhew the poverty of infidelity, than an attempt at a work of this kind, which would be found to conſiſt of negatives without a ſingle poſitive fact to reſt upon: and it is at leaſt as great a reflexion upon infidelity to be ſupported by weak arguments, as it would be for religion to be defended by ſuch. God we ſay has delivered this religion to the world, we do not pretend to be the authors of it, nor even to comprehend it; and therefore are neither obliged, nor capable to explain it fully: if it was our own work, we might

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be reaſonably aſked to account for every thing in it. Now the ſyſtem of infidels is their own work, and therefore they ought to be able to give a full and rational account of it, and fix the opinions of their diſciples upon ſomething poſitive, and not content themſelves with denying things to be facts which we alledge are ſo; they muſt have a poor claim to be facts indeed, if they would not be ill exchanged for the dreams of infidelity. And until the infidels can produce ſtronger arguments in proof of their principles, even if nothing were alledged againſt them, it is not ſo clear a point that religion is an impoſition upon mankind, as that a prudent man would depend upon it.

And indeed I would require no more of a man when he examines the arguments for and againſt revelation, than to carry his worldly prudence along with him, and to act with the ſame caution in his ſpiritual concerns, as he does in his temporal affairs, about which, I am ſorry to ſay it, mankind are more ſincere and in earneſt than about religion.

But if the view of the Chriſtian Religion, which I have taken, be a true one, it carries a very alarming appearance with regard to ſuch unbelievers, and a very ſerious appearance with regard to the whole human race. The ſcheme ſeems fairly and fully laid before mankind, and they may attend to it or neglect it as they pleaſe, without any further information or warning. No diſpoſition is ſhewn to humour conceited men with occaſional ſatisfaction. This religion keeps on its courſe with a ſolemn and awful ſteadineſs, as far above all partiality. And having accompanied human nature, and ſeen all its powers and weakneſſes, its perfections and imperfections, the

Chriſtian

Chriſtian Religion is then with awful majeſty to ſhut up the ſcene of mortality.

The ſporting of an infidel with ſuch a plan as this, is a ſerious madneſs: and the ſerious attempt to fetter it in human ſyſtems, would be but badly repreſented by the folly of him who ſhould think of ſtopping the waves of the ocean with a grain of ſand.

Let us therefore examine with care and awful attention the progreſs of ſuch a religion, which both promiſes and threatens ſo much; nor ſuffer ourſelves to be laughed out of our hopes of immortality by the unſeaſonable buffoonery of wits and libertines, nor try to reſt that faith upon human ſyſtems, nor upon any ſuch principles, which ſtands upon FACTS, and ought to ſtand upon no other foundation than that of the apoſtles and prophets, Jeſus Chriſt himſelf being the chief corner ſtone.

Another thing very proper to be attended to by every ſerious inquirer after religious truth, is this; that the condition in which we are here placed, naturally ſuppoſes that we ſhould not have the cleareſt evidence for things belonging to revelation: but rather ſuch as would have a tendency to keep the mind in a ſtate of ſuſpence. For as the providence of God is carrying on two ſchemes at the ſame time, by the ſame agents, it is impoſſible for us to ſay how far a clear diſcovery of the one might be conſiſtent with the other.

We find that ſometimes even imaginary views of a future ſtate are ſufficiently engaging to deſtroy all reliſh for the enjoyments of the preſent: how much more, then, might we expect the ſame conſequence from a clear view of the reality? the joys of which the Scripture confirms to be ſo great

great, that it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive them.

Beſides, the very nature of a ſtate of probation, in the ſenſe in which it has been explained in this argument, ſeems to imply an evidence encumbered with many difficulties, both from the part that mankind are allowed to take in carrying on this ſcheme, and alſo from the various inſtruments made uſe of in carrying it on. And where would be the merit in reſiſting a temptation to gratify an ordinary appetite, in order to obtain a great and durable good, unleſs the proſpect of it was both remote, and attended with ſome uncertainty.

We may, therefore, reſt aſſured, that God in his infinite wiſdom intended his revelation ſhould be incumbered with, and involved in all its preſent difficulties, as a trial of our faith, an exerciſe of our patience, and a proof of our teachable diſpoſition; and that even thus it is better fitted for anſwering our purpoſes, than if it had leſs of the myſterious in it.

Laſtly, when we are engaged in a ſubject of ſuch importance as this, we ſhould do our utmoſt endeavour to conquer that ficklenefs of mind which ſo ſtrongly characterizes all our extravagant deſires, but ſhews itſelf particularly in our ſcruples about religious evidence. This diſpoſition is in no caſe a proof of want, but rather proceeds from a mind rendered wanton by abundance. Overlooking the happineſs which our preſent circumſtances might furniſh us with, we think if we were in ſuch a ſituation we ſhould be compleatly happy.

In the ſame manner it happens with regard to religious evidence: many of us, I dare ſay, think that if we had been favoured with the ſame evidence which our Saviour gave the Jews in con-

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firmation of his divine commiſſion, it would have ſatisfied us compleatly; and that the works which he did in his Father's name would have been to us an undoubted teſtimony that his Father had ſent him.

But the Jews, on the other hand, had their minds ſo prepoſſeſſed with the temporal power of the Meſſiah, that they ſhut both their ears and eyes againſt the cleareſt evidence.

To ſtrengthen our faith, beſides all other evidence, we have the full completion of a very diſtinct and particular prophecy of our Saviour concerning the obſcure beginning, and future flouriſhing ſtate of his kingdom againſt all human probability. And by the wonderful providence of God, the very infidelity of the Jews is become a ſtanding argument for the truth of that very religion which they deny.

A careful attention to the fulfilling of prophecies, and the progreſs of the Chriſtian Religion, ſeems to be the additional evidence reſerved for theſe latter days, by which we are to diſcover that God is ſtill active in carrying on his purpoſes for the redemption of the world. But as the completion of prophecies muſt keep pace with the affairs of mankind, the ordinary life of an infidel, who gives no credit to any teſtimony beyond his own poſſible experience, will hardly upon this ground furniſh matter for a rational conviction. But if the Supreme Being would condeſcend to accompliſh a few prophecies to humour him, he would believe.

In the ſame manner, the Jews would not condeſcend to attend to the ordinary courſe of our Saviour's miracles; but expected that he was to deſcend from his dignity and character ſo far as to humour every ſcrupulous inquiſitive fool with a

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ſign from heaven, and then they would believe. "Nay but, father Abraham, if one roſe from the "dead, they would believe." But Abraham knew too well this diſpoſition in mankind againſt which I am now ſpeaking, to think that it would have been of any uſe to comply with the requeſt. "If "they believe not Moſes and the prophets, neither "will they be perſuaded though one roſe from "the dead."

This is an alarming part of our character, as it makes our opinions ſo unſtable, that different times of life, different circumſtances, and different humours, require freſh arguments in proof of our religion. The ways of God are fixed and uniform, and are not to be ſuited to our capricious humours. Let us, therefore, ſeriouſly conſider our condition, and not think ourſelves of ſuch importance that Heaven ought to work miracles to remove our unreaſonable ſcruples. Let us only attend with modeſty to the arguments which may be derived from the manifeſtations of himſelf which God has already condeſcended to give us, and we ſhall find them ſufficient for eſtabliſhing a ſolid and rational conviction.

THE END.